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INSIDE THE

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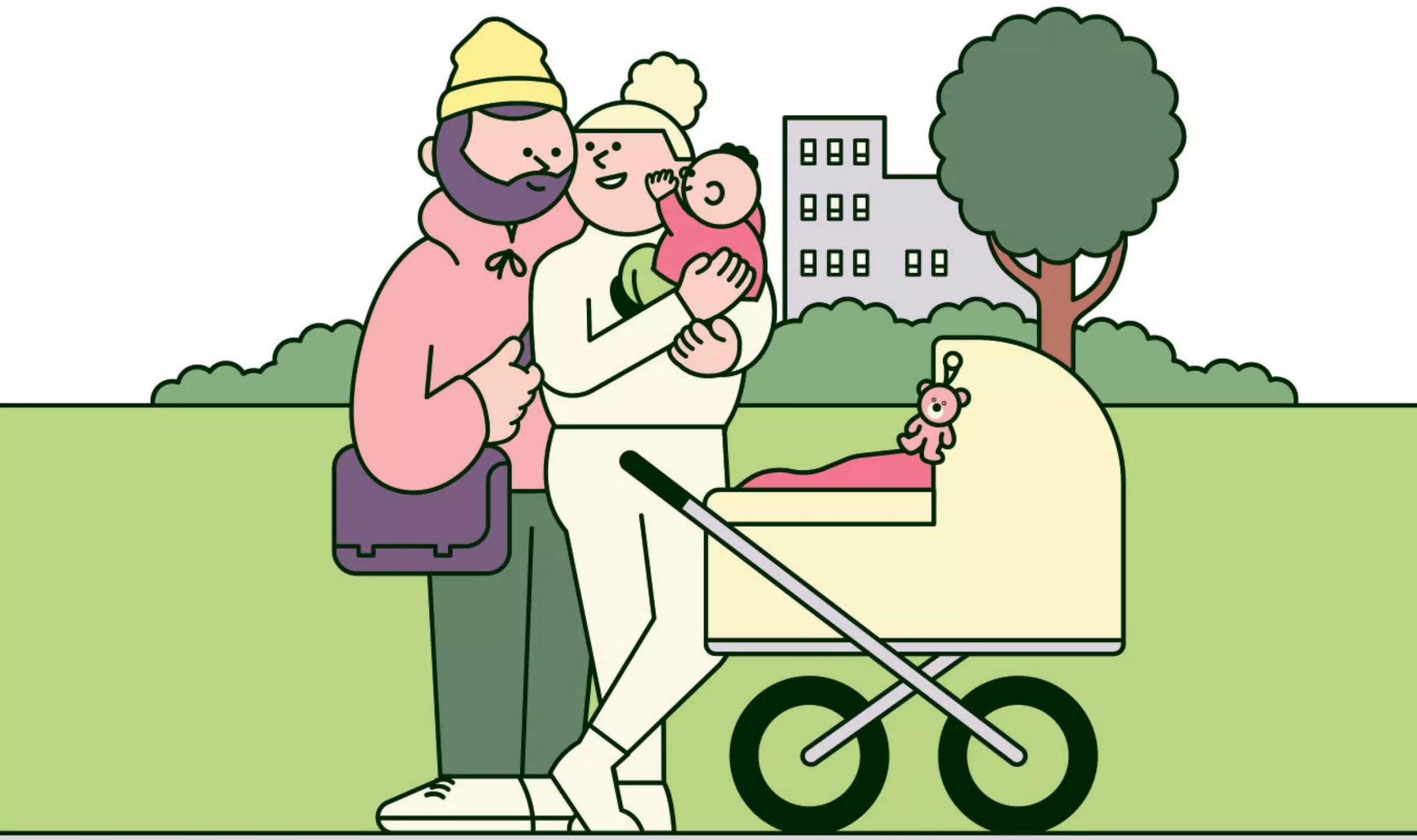

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR GUILTY PLEASURE PS2 GAME?

DARRAN JONES

Dino Stalker isn't the greatest lightgun game, but it at least tries doing something different and has lots of dinosaurs in it.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Pick Pack Pup*
Favourite game of all time: *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

TIM EMPEY

Anyone remember *Chaos Legion*? I didn't for a while, but it popped into my head the other day. Nonsense story like, but it's great fun and I even liked the hit-stun system.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Avowed*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

It has to be *Simple 2000 Series Vol.94: The Akachampion – Come On Baby.* It's like *Track & Field*, but with babies and electrified skipping ropes, and that's underselling it.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *TNA Impact!*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

Dynasty Warriors, it doesn't really matter which one. Just endless button bashing though masses of endless soldiers is great fun.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

RORY MILNE

It largely comes down to hack, slash and repeat, but I keep coming back to *Warriors Orochi 2*. I guess the heart wants what the heart wants.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

MARTYN CARROLL

It has to be *SOS: The Final Escape*. It's as janky as hell, but its earthquake-hit city setting leads to some truly extraordinary setpieces.
Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing: *Resident Evil Village*
Favourite game of all time: *Jet Set Willy*

GRAEME MASON

It's definitely *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*. I know it's about as deep as a puddle compared to the PC RPGs but I just find it satisfying wandering around bashing skulls and looting. Send help.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Dying Light*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

ANDREW FISHER

The quirky *Katamari Damacy* was NTSC only, so I had to invest in extra hardware to play it. Totally worth it.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Super Polygon Grand Prix*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

PAUL ROSE

Dog's Life for me. It's spectacularly odd.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Stray*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

LOADING...

Sony's PlayStation 2 remains the most popular console of all time, having now sold over 160 million units. While it's unclear if this impressive figure will ever be beaten, what is clear is that Sony's second console is an incredibly interesting one and we've gone all out to celebrate it this month.

In addition to Nick's fantastic tech feature, you'll also find a double-sided poster of *God Of War* and *Shadow Of The Colossus* (which are both celebrating their 20th anniversaries this year) as well as a 32-page mini magazine filled with 60 essential PS2 games to add to your collection.

Outside of our extensive PS2 coverage we've a look at the creation of *The Legacy: Realm Of Terror*, the many great games of Odin Computer Graphics, and Ultimate Guides on Taito's *Bubble Bobble* and Capcom's *Dino Crisis*. We also speak to Julian Rignall about his lengthy career in videogames and discover how three young programmers created the astonishing PC port of *Turrican II: The Final Fight*.

Oh, and make sure you check out our latest subs offer on page 28 so you never miss an issue of your favourite magazine going forward.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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>> Load 270 Breathing new life into classic games

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What was your most memorable PS2 moment? Paul has one, but you'll probably not share it with him

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Darran loved *Highway Encounter*, so he was a tad upset when he found out the sequel wasn't quite as good

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Nick doesn't have many regrets in life, but he does wish he managed to grab this Neo Geo classic when it was cheap

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Do you try and sneak things into the shopping when your wife isn't looking? Darran certainly does

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A wrestling game? Who could have written this? We'll give you a clue, it wasn't Darran

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Amazingly, Darran still hasn't played *Grand Theft Auto V*. It's because the only *GTA* game he enjoys playing is this dual-screen beauty

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Ultimate Guide: Bubble Bobble
Graeme Mason is here to guide you though one of Taito's greatest arcade games. Enjoy

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Conversion Capers: Turrican II: The Final Fight

Find out how three youngsters updated Manfred Trenz's iconic blaster for the PC

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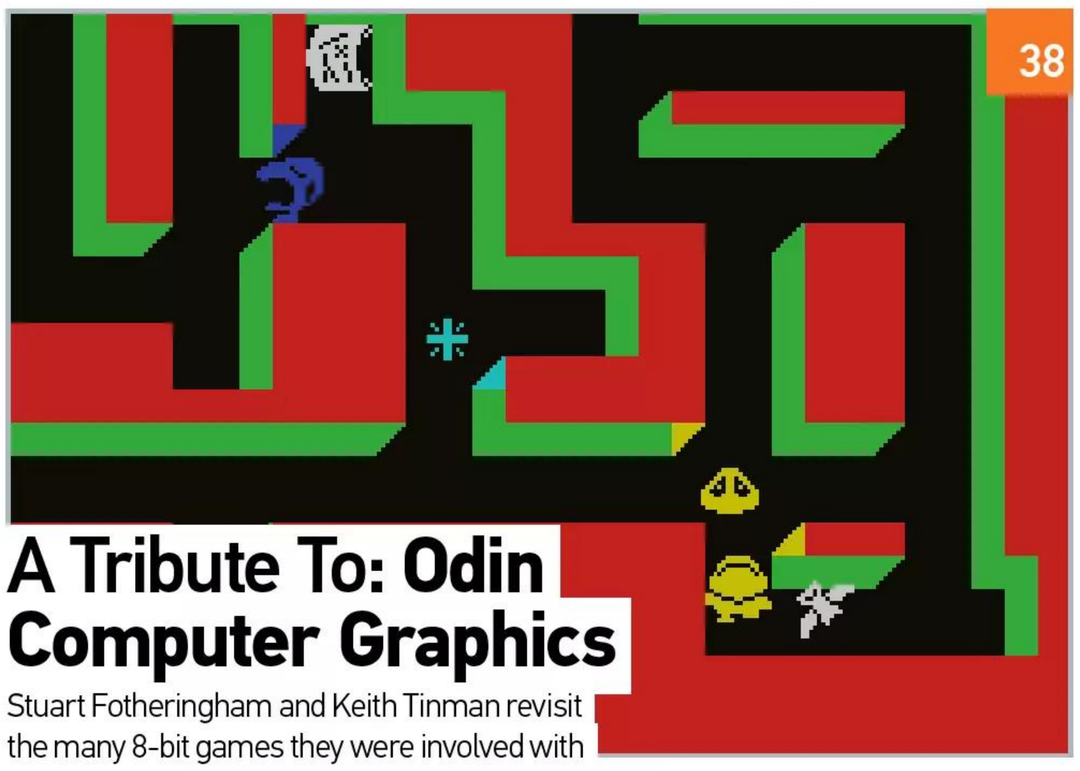

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A Tribute To: Odin Computer Graphics

Stuart Fotheringham and Keith Tinman revisit the many 8-bit games they were involved with

retroradar

GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

» [Amiga] Stéphane Picq's excellent soundtrack to *Dune* was re-released as *Dune: Spice Opera* in 2023.

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RICH LEGACIES

Retro Gamer pays tribute to the recent gaming legends we've lost

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We pay tribute to the gaming veterans we've lost in recent months, including Jonathan Nash and Mark Sibly

8 IAIN LEE
This month Iain recalls the first time he ever played on the PlayStation 2 and how he bricked his import system

10 MR BIFFO
Paul is also feeling nostalgic for Sony's second console and revisits some of his favourite games

12 A MOMENT WITH
David Jones is currently working on the fifth game in his *Magic Knight* series. Find out what he has planned for it

14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
It's September 2008 and Nick is skipping across the time lines so that you don't have to. Isn't he nice

Since we mentioned the sad passing of Team17 cofounder Martyn Brown in December of 2024, Retro Gamer has been made aware of other members of the games industry who are sadly no longer with us.

Regarding Martyn Brown, Team17 now has a dedicated tribute page to him, with contributions from a great number of Team17 staff, past and present, including current CEO Debbie Bestwick, head of design Kevin Carthew, designer John Eggett and many more. Former cofounder Andreas Tadic shared the following on the tribute page. "The sheer count of people and communities he has connected is unique. Same goes for the games and projects he has led from scratch to success."

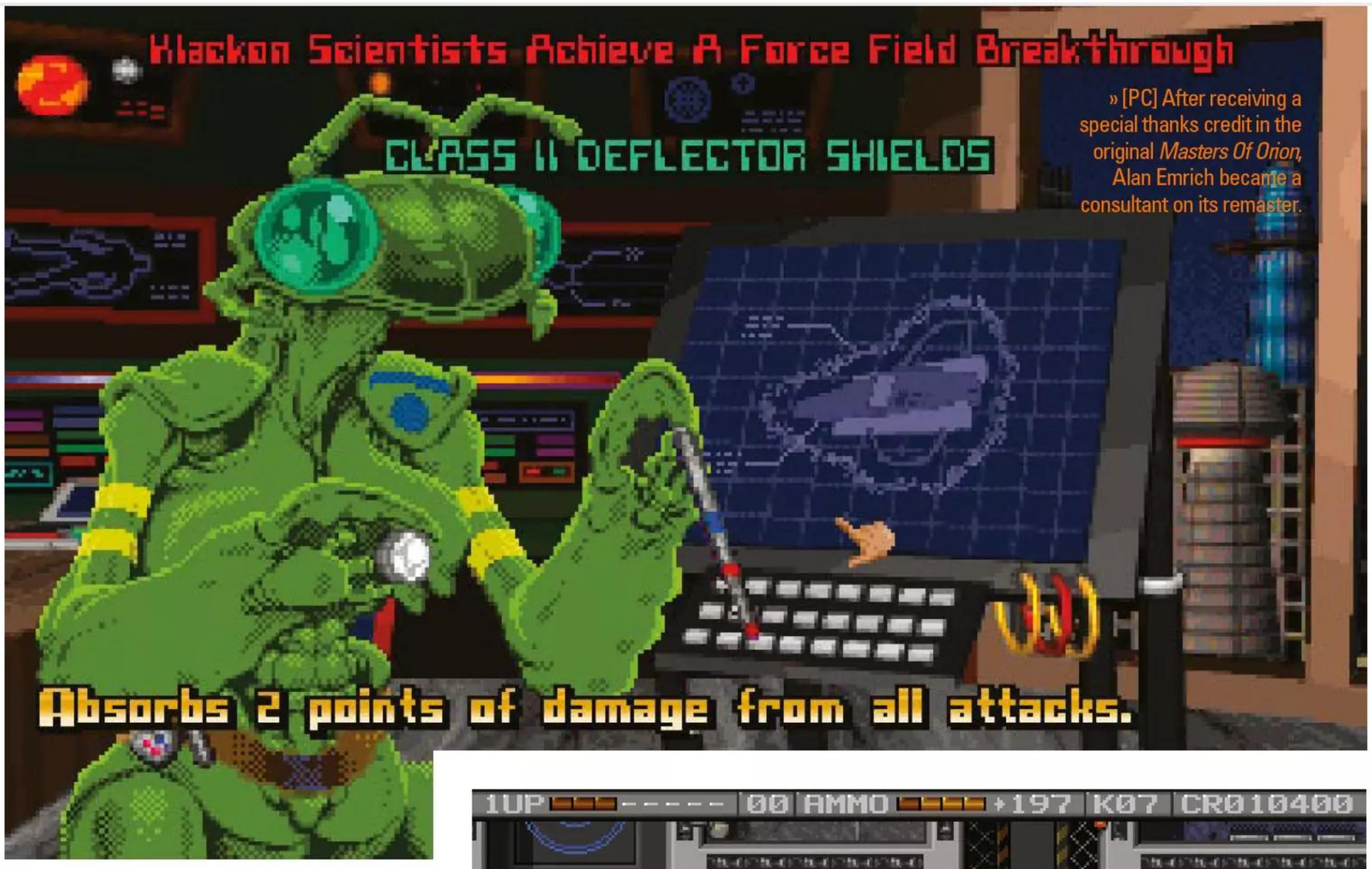
VGDensetsu recently reported on the passing of French composer Stéphane Picq after The Vahinée posted the news on its Facebook page. "It is with great sadness that we learned of Stéphane's departure… A regular, a friend, a family member," began the post. "He was one of those people who leave a mark, by their authenticity, their frankness and all those shared moments that will remain etched in our hearts."

> "The sheer count of people and communities he has connected is unique"
> ANDREAS TADIC

Stéphane created the soundtracks for a number of games, including *Dune*, *Commander Blood*, *Lost Eden* and *MegaRace 1*. Stéphane started working in the games industry from 1987, typically producing work for Cryo Interactive and ERE Informatique and eventually retired in 1998 when he moved to Madagascar. He went on to release some of his earlier soundtracks, including *MegaRace 1* and *Dune: Spice Opera*. He died at the age of 59 after a long illness.

While we briefly touched on it in last month's homebrew section, we also wanted to highlight the passing of Mark Sibly again, whose work had a big impact on the home-computer scene. Acid Software shared the following Facebook post on 12 December. "It is with great sadness that I share this tragic news. Mark Sibly died at the beginning of December after struggling with a variety of health issues. I am certain that many like myself owe Mark a jubilant debt of gratitude for providing us the software tools, the computer games and the guitar licks that enriched our lives."

In addition to founding Acid Software, Mark was responsible for Blitz Basic, a popular language that was used for countless games, including *Total Wormage*. Mark's programming credits include various Amiga games such as *Gloom*, *Guardian* and *Overkill*.


Klackon Scientists Achieve A Force Field Breakthrough
CLASS II DEFLECTOR SHIELDS
Absorbs 2 points of damage from all attacks.

» [PC] After receiving a special thanks credit in the original *Masters Of Orion*, Alan Emrich became a consultant on its remaster.

» [Amiga CD32] *Guardian* was an acclaimed shooter that showed off the technical prowess of Mark Sibly.

» [Amiga] Martyn Brown was involved in numerous Team17 games, including *Alien Breed II*.

Game Developer reported in early January that Alan Emrich had passed. In addition to coining the term 4X for describing specific strategy games, Alan was involved in numerous board games and videogames, including *Master Of Orion 3*, and *Conquest Of The New World*. In addition to founding Victory Point Games, Alan was also involved with many LA-based gaming conventions.

Fans of *Amiga Power* and *Your Sinclair* were shocked to hear the news that Jonathan Nash had passed when it was announced on Bluesky by Dirk Maggs and X by Stuart Campbell. Dirk shared the following, "Farewell Jonathan Nash, who with Mil Millington wrote one of the funniest series I've ever had the joy to make. Gone far too soon, but my goodness what a rare talent." While Stuart Campbell shared, "For fans of *Your Sinclair* and *Amiga Power*, I bring the sad news that Jonathan Nash, aka Jon Pillar, aka well there's a whole list, has passed from this mortal coil and presumably back to his distant home planet. Sadness is appropriate at this time. That is all."

The news turned into a big outpouring of love for Jonathan, with Kieron Gillen writing, "He was the first person who I'd describe as an actual hero who I was friends with," in a lengthy post on his personal blog. John Walker also paid tribute to Jonathan in an article for Kotaku, sharing the following in relation to Jonathan's tremendous work on *Amiga Power*. "The magazine's finest writer was Jonathan Nash, a unique voice whose astonishing prose forced everyone around him to aim to keep up. No one could. The best sorts tried."

It was reported in early February that games designer Michael 'Mick' Mancuso had passed from cancer, with his son Dominic sharing the news and a very personal tribute about his last few hours on Facebook. Michael was involved in the programming and engineering of several games such as *Top Gun: Fire At Will!* And *Hornet: Navel Strike Fighter*, but also worked on the design of numerous games, including *MechWarrior 3* and a range of *Dungeons & Dragons* games, including *Curse Of The Azure Bonds*, *Secret Of The Silver Blades* and *Champions Of Krynn*.

Our thoughts go out to all the friends and family of Martyn Brown, Stéphane Picq, Mark Sibly, Alan Emrich, Jonathan Nash and Michael Mancuso. They may be gone, but their excellent work means they won't be forgotten. ✱

ATARI TREATS

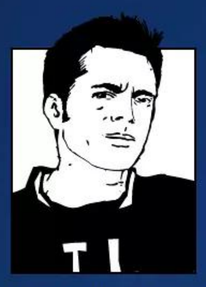
After impressing gamers with his reimaging of Atari's *Akka Arrh*, Jeff Minter is back with another reboot – a psychedelic overhaul of Dave Theurer's *I, Robot*. It's due out later this year and is already looking like a worthy follow-up to *Akka Arrh*. Blaze is also working with Atari and recently announced a new ten-game Evercade cart which will include arcade versions of *Fire Truck* and *Maze Invaders*, as well as several Stern games that Atari now owns. More news soon.

MORE ONIMUSHA

Capcom surprised us recently when it announced a remaster of *Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny* will be arriving in May. Don't expect a massive overhaul in the style of Konami's incoming *Metal Gear Solid 3* remake, but you can expect improved HD visuals and enhanced controls, similar to what Capcom did for its first *Onimusha* game in 2019. Here's hoping the Jean Reno-starring *Onimusha 3* is also being considered for a similar treatment.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

PS number two?



I have no idea how I got my first PS2. What I do remember is that it was a Japanese machine. Why did I have an import machine? I'm afraid at the time I was being a very naughty boy and I can't recall much of what was going on back then. I was on the telly and quite possibly at the peak of my D list 'fame' so there is a strong chance I was gifted it. What I wasn't gifted was a power converter. Being an idiot, I didn't realise I needed one. So I plugged it in using a standard plug adaptor and you'll never guess what happened. It blew up! Crazy, right? I was gutted but had to accept it was entirely my fault.

At one point I had a PS2 test machine. I got this when I was hosting *Thumb Bandits*. They gave it to me so I could play beta games and foreign imports to review for the show. I assumed it was a gift and it belonged to me forever. I didn't realise it was just a loan. A couple of weeks after *Thumb Bandits* ended I received a call from the production company.

"Iain, do you still have that PS2 test console?"

"Er... no …"

"Oh, really? That's odd."

"Yeah, no, I returned it."

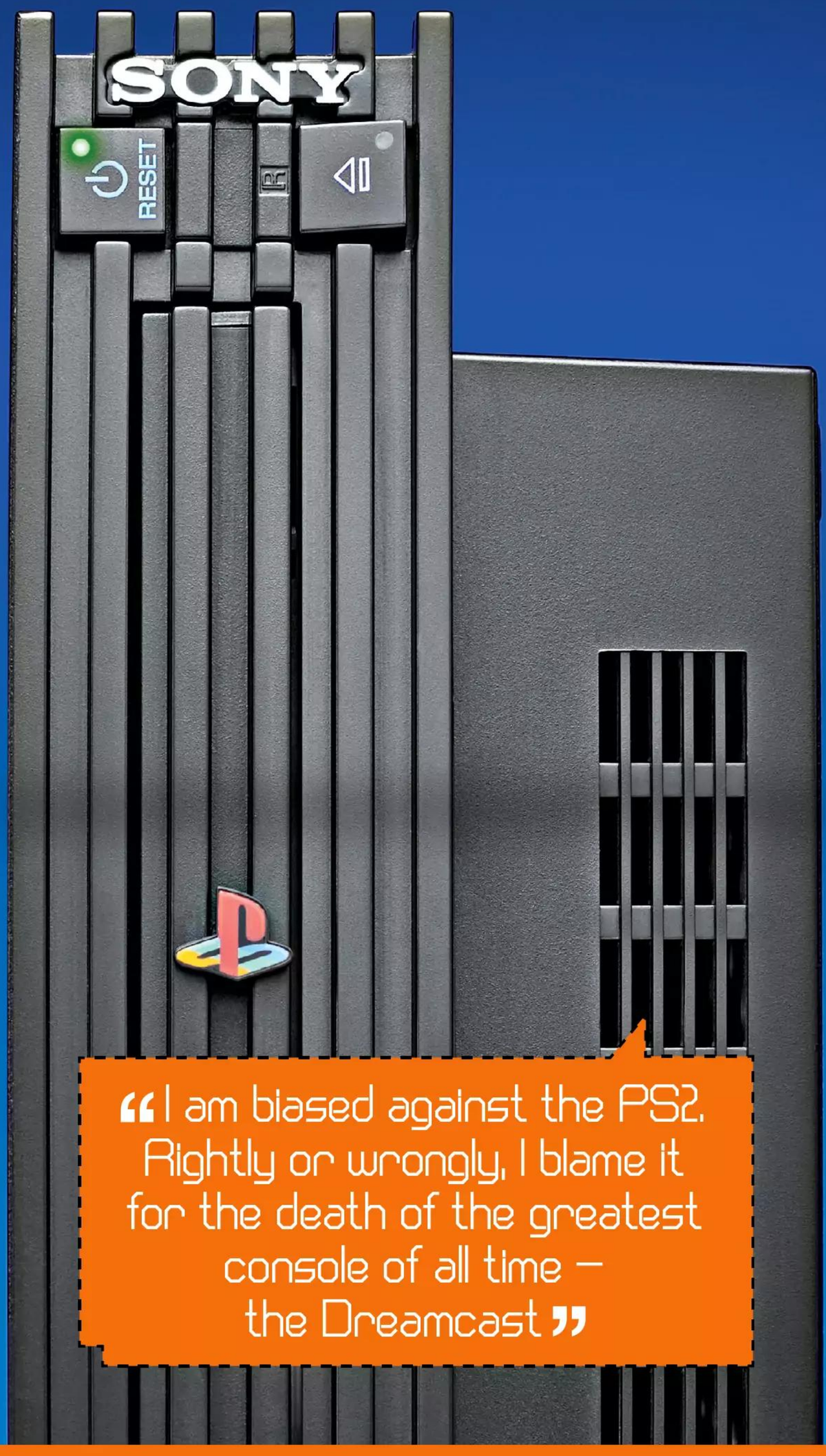
"Right…"

At the time I thought I'd cleverly tricked them. Looking back now I cringe with embarrassment. I was once again being an absolute twit (or something that sounds like that) and the team on the other end of the phone must have thoroughly hated me. Sorry, everyone. You'll be pleased to hear I no longer have it. I gave it away with a whole host of treasures when we had our first kid and I thought it was the responsible thing to do.

I am biased against the PS2. Rightly or wrongly, I blame it for the death of the greatest console of all time – the Dreamcast. I remember all this hype about it being banned in some countries because it was so powerful it could launch nuclear strikes. That was a great piece of marketing. Also, people kept banging on about the Emotion Engine that could learn your playing style and adapt to it. Balls. Utter balls.

The final indignation was the first year of games. Apart from a few notable exceptions, the opening 12 months of releases sucked. When the best thing to come out was a bloody fireworks demo, you knew you were in trouble. Everyone was waiting for the highly anticipated *The Bouncer*. And then when it was eventually released we all wondered why we'd been so excited.

I like the PS2 now and I had a lot of fun with it. But for me it never really connected in the way the two machines either side of it did. The PlayStation was so mind-blowing and the PS3 seemed like a glimpse into the future. Saying that, I'm wondering if I should get a cheap one off eBay and have a crack at it? If I did, what would you recommend me sinking my teeth into?



> "I am biased against the PS2. Rightly or wrongly, I blame it for the death of the greatest console of all time – the Dreamcast"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

> "It had one of the most unmemorable launch line-ups in gaming history"

A feeble launch

The first time I saw a PS2 with my own eyes must've been around 1998 or 1999. I don't remember the specific date – but it was some time before the console was released. It might've even been before it had been officially announced. In fact, it wasn't even the finished hardware, but a test kit at one of Sony's in-house studios.

I remember clearly what was running on it; a game that, to the best of my recollection, was never released. It was demonstrated to a bunch of us as an example of what the PS2 was going to be able to do. The unfinished game was some sort of third-person fantasy adventure, in which the protagonist could transform at will between human and werewolf forms. It was quite impressive, and clearly a step-up from what the original PlayStation could do, but… for whatever reason, development on the game must've been abandoned at some point.

I'll be honest… this is kind of the most vivid memory I have of the PS2. Of all the PlayStation models we've had, the PS2 is probably the one I remember least fondly. I've even had to look at a list of PS2 games for this column, because I can never remember which games were released on the PS2, and which came out the previous or subsequent generation of hardware.

That might be because it had one of the most unmemorable launch line-ups in gaming history. *TimeSplitters* may be the only one I remember with any real clarity – and the remainder are a hodgepodge of filler titles, sports games, and a couple of tent-pole sequels (specifically *Ridge Racer V* and *Tekken Tag Tournament*, neither of which ever did anything for me).

Anybody remember *X-Squad*? *Orphen*? *Fantavision*? *Swing Away Golf*?

For me, that launch day line-up was always SO important to establish a new generation of hardware. Think of *Super Mario 64*. *Halo: Combat Evolved*. *Ridge Racer*. *Tetris*. *Wii Sports*. You need that game which slaps you around the head and goes, "THIS is why you spent hundreds of pounds to upgrade."

I mean, having a feeble launch catalogue did the PS2 very little harm – being not only backwards compatible, but the first games console to double as a DVD Player – though I never really grew to love it in the way that I had, say, the original PlayStation or Xbox 360. First impressions count.

My favourite franchise to appear on the PS2 was *Jak And Daxter*, which managed to display the storytelling, world-building, and gameplay that Naughty Dog would hone to great acclaim in later generations. I still hold out hope that the company will one day shun its cinematic ambitions and return to the series. Unlikely, I know.

God Of War was another series I enjoyed a lot – probably more so than the recent reboots, which lost the chaotic action of the originals. *SSX* I put far too much time into to be healthy, and those games still give me a warm, Christmassy, feeling.

Beyond that though – and while acknowledging the likes of *Okami* and *Shadow Of The Colossus* – I honestly don't know what my defining PS2 game would be. What's yours?

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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2) Load a Savegame
3) Quickstart (Instant new game)
4) Options and Settings
5) Start a new Challenge Mode Game
6) Extras and Generators
7) Report a bug/Suggest a feature
8) Community Links
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I reply to nearly every comment across our community, so don't be a stranger!

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Also out now our physical Collector's Edition on Warsimstore.com

» [PC] "This screen is showing that the menus aren't a permanent feature," says David. "They're there when we want them, but gone when we want to move about."

David Jones

The Spectrum legend is working on a brand-new Magic Knight game

» David Jones is the creator of the popular *Magic Knight* series and currently works at the Breda University Of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands.

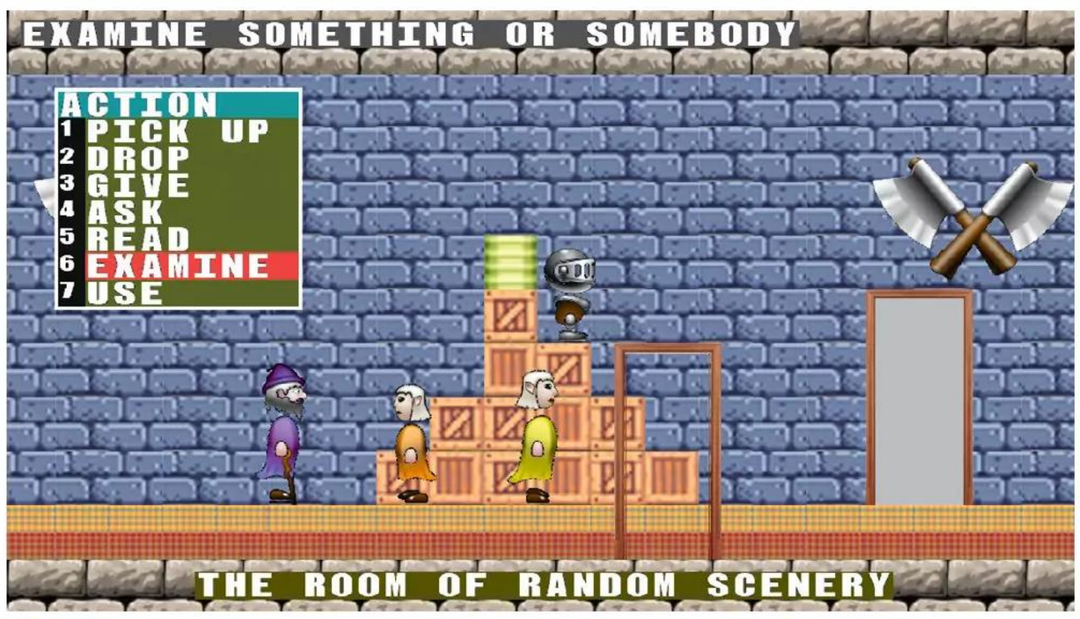
It has been 40 years since the gaming world was introduced to *Magic Knight*. Creator David Jones has always hinted at a new game in the series and now it's finally happening. So here's what you can expect to find in David's new game.

How does it feel returning to the *Magic Knight* series after all this time, David?
Very comfortable. I've been busy writing books for a few years so I didn't get to do a lot of new programming. I'd forgotten how much I enjoy writing games. Almost a decade ago I looked at writing a new 3D *Magic Knight* game using Unity, but it didn't feel right. Going full-on 3D lost a lot of the original style and I didn't really enjoy using such a large engine. However, taking a closer approach to the original games is working well.

You once told us in an earlier interview that the Magic Knight was actually female and there were plans to reveal this in a game that never happened. Is this going to be that game?
Nope. Whoever or whatever is inside the suit can and does vary from time to time. I have an idea for a novelisation project where I'll fill in the bits between the games. That, if I ever get to it, will cover the origin story of the Magic Knight and how the original person ended up in the suit.

How has game development changed in the last 40 years?
On one hand it's much easier. The tools have advanced significantly. I was writing the original games in assembly language with no debugging support. I had a decent development system because I was using my Tandy TRS-80 Model III and downloading the code to the spectrum, but by today's standards it was still very primitive. On the other hand it's harder. Players expect so much more and the audience has grown so there's more competition.

What can you tell us about the new game so far in terms of story and mechanics?
I'm writing *MK5* in C++ for the PC. That means I can have much better graphics and a lot more content. Obviously, I've upgraded things. For the new game I'm scrolling the rooms, moving the other characters and I've added three layers to walk on. Plus I'll have save game options. Although, for true retro gamers, I'm putting in a hardcore Retro Gamer Mode where sudden unrecoverable deaths are a feature.



» [PC] "This is demonstrating the top level Windimation 2.0 menu," explains David. "It also shows some connecting doors into and out of the screen and some of the characters in the game."

» [PC] David tells us that this room is, "Showing MK controlling Lady Rosmar (centre screen) on a background platform and half-obscured by the level 2 inventory menu."

» [PC] "You can see the earlier menus shrunken and stacked in the top left," explains David. "Also, the mouse cursor is visible with my test mouseover text."

When do you hope to release the new game?
I'm aiming for summer 2025. I work at Breda University Of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands and that means I get a nice long summer holiday. Everything is progressing nicely, and I could probably release it sooner, but I want to make sure I do it right.

You've mentioned a Steam release. Will it be heading to any other formats?
Yes, that's the intention. I've made some initial enquiries with people who write for the Spectrum Next and I'll be looking at the Android and iOS platforms.

Is anyone assisting you with the new game, David?
Programming is just me, although I did start with the template we give to year 1 students. That's just a bare-bones set of classes for sprites, surfaces, user input and a few other things, although I've rewritten a chunk of that now. Saul Cross has created most of the graphics. On that point please note, the screenshots you see here aren't using the transparency properly. I'll fix that later, but I want to get the interface and gameplay working properly before I do that.

How has it been crafting puzzles for this new game, compared to the earlier ones?
Actually fairly similar. The puzzle ideas occur to me during development when I spot a possibility with the current objects or characters or when I think of a fun new way to use an object. For example, somebody recently mentioned doing a cash grab on *Finders Keepers* where they try to end up with the maximum amount of money. That made me think of fun ways to support that idea so there will be a cash grab challenge in *MK5* and there will be fun ways to increase the value of some objects. For example, polishing some things, filling bottles and joining things to make more valuable objects.

» [ZX Spectrum] The *Magic Knight* series started off with *Finder Keepers*. It's a very different game to its sequels.

Will you be using a new system or keeping the Windimation of the earlier games?
As you can see in some of the images, the new Windimation 2.0 system is strongly based on the original Windimation from the 8-bit games, but it has enhancements. These include scrolling windows and support for mouse and controller, plus more use of graphics rather than just the names of objects and other characters. ✱

David is currently running a competition to name *MK5*. Find out more by visiting davidxjonesauthor.com/mk5

> "Whoever or whatever is inside the suit can and does vary from time to time"
>
> DAVID JONES

» [ZX Spectrum] *Stormbringer*'s Troll is not a character you'll easily forget. For a start he's huge!

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

SEPTEMBER 2008 – Heavyweight fighters square up for their fourth round, downloadable delights proliferate and we return to a galaxy far, far away. Nick takes you back to a time the global economy was crashing, but gaming was still good

NEWS SEPTEMBER 2008

The ongoing global financial crisis took a sharp turn for the worse in September, as financial institutions began to fail in number. In the USA, the government took over home mortgage lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac on 7 September, before Lehman Brothers collapsed on 15 September – still the largest bankruptcy in American history, with the company holding over $600 billion in assets. The British bank Bradford & Bingley was broken up on 29 September, with the government nationalising everything but the savings business and branch network, which were sold to Santander.

On 10 September, scientists at CERN in Switzerland successfully fired protons around the Large Hadron Collider for the first time. The underground particle accelerator has been described as the world's largest scientific experiment, and was designed to test various theories of particle physics, including the existence of the Higgs boson.

The final episode of *Grange Hill* aired on BBC1 on 15 September. BBC News reported that the series creator Phil Redmond was unhappy with changes to the show, with the writer saying, "I do now think the point of *Grange Hill* has been lost."

» [Arcade] It would take months for *Street Fighter IV* to finally make it to UK arcades.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 2008

After plenty of hype, the arcade version of *Street Fighter IV* was ready to go, and it scored 9/10 in both *games™* and *Edge*. Praising the way that special moves were easier to perform, *Edge* noted that, "The inputs are the same as ever, but *SFIV* is generous in its interpretation of your intentions, and much less fiddly." The new mechanics also impressed *games™*, with the mag stating, "If the Focus system proves as versatile a tool as it appears, then we may now have a *Street Fighter* to top *3rd Strike*," and also noted that the new Ultra Combos can make for "truly tense exchanges" between evenly matched players.

At home, *Soulcalibur IV* drew almost universal praise on the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, with scores of 94% from *Play*, 9/10 each from *X360* and *Official PlayStation Magazine*, 4/5 from *360*, 8/10 from *games™* and 7/10 from *Official Xbox Magazine*. *Play* felt that it was, "An amazingly deep and beautiful fighting experience, marred by a couple of unnecessary characters," referring to *Star Wars* guests Darth Vader and the Secret Apprentice. *OXM* criticised the game's offering for solo players, saying that, "It's fortunate that the series can now rest on the safety net of online play and character customisation because, without it this would be a slender, anorexic package."

If you're wondering who the Secret Apprentice is, he's the protagonist of *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, the Xbox 360 version of which received scores of 8/10 in *OXM*, 7/10 in *games™* and 3/5 in *360*. Though *games™* described it as "occasionally mediocre" and felt that "the combat falls flat after only a few hours", its review concluded that "the storytelling, characters and general *Star Wars*-ness of the entire experience raises it above the sum of its parts". The Wii version scored 82% in *Official Nintendo Magazine*, which praised the "fantastic" motion controls and variety of moves, but criticised the

» [PlayStation 3] The *Star Wars* characters, which included Yoda on the Xbox 360, were divisive, but *Soulcalibur IV* was as sharp as ever.

game for being "heartbreakingly short" at six hours long.

Downloadable games were all the rage this month, particularly on the Xbox 360 where a port of the original *Soulcalibur* earned 9/10 from *OXM* and 5/5 from *360*. *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved 2* scored 9/10 each from *OXM*, *games™* and *Edge*, and 5/5 from *360* which said that, "While this sequel might be twice the cost of the original, it effectively offers six times the content." *Braid* also got 5/5 from *360* and 9/10 from both *games™* and *OXM*. The official magazine said that, "The time-twisting gimmick introduced for each level twists each puzzle into a mystery," and concluded that, "*Braid* isn't for everyone but for those who love it, this will be a special experience, especially when they see the ending."

Sticking with downloadable games, Capcom's enhanced NES remake *Bionic Commando Rearmed* earned praise on both Xbox 360 and PS3, scoring 88% in *Play*, 8/10 in *OXM* and 7/10 in *games™*. On the PS3, *Ratchet & Clank: Quest For Booty* divided opinions, earning 9/10 from *OPM*, 8/10 from *Edge*, 69% from *Play* and 6/10 from *games™*. *OPM* felt that "the brevity means there's not an ounce of slack: every moment is a gem; every level is a setpiece", while *Play* felt that it was "undeniably a throwback to the PS2 era of platform games" and "devoid of ambition". *Strong Bad's Cool Game For Attractive People: Episode 1* on Wii and PC was similarly divisive. The game earned 88% from *ONM*, which felt that Telltale's adventure game offered a "good amount of replay value" and 4/10 from *Edge* which felt that it was "painfully short on interaction". It also scored 7/10 from *Total PC Gaming* and 5/10 from *games™*.

Over on the PC, Chernobyl-themed first-person shooter *STALKER: Clear Sky scored* 9/10 from both *games™* and *Total PC Gaming*, 7/10 from *Edge* and 68% from *PC Gamer*. As *games™* saw it, "None of the praiseworthy features of the original have been removed, and enhancements have been made in almost every conceivable area." However, *PC Gamer* felt that, "GSC seem to have broken the delicate balance of atmosphere that made the original game so intense and grim," citing "insanely chirpy […] comedic and wacky" characters and loudspeaker announcements as low points of the "disappointment of the year so far."

Join us again next month, as the lead in to the holiday season brings an inevitable glut of releases. ✱

» [PC] These characters don't look tremendously chirpy, but then screenshots don't talk.

» [Xbox 360] Lots of people really like *Braid*. People like Coldplay too. You can't trust people.

» [PlayStation 3] Oh look, it's a Vulcan magic gun. We're also *Ratchet & Clank* experts, don't you know.

» [Xbox 360] As *Star Wars* experts, we know that this is some kind of Vulcan magic.

CHARTS

SEPTEMBER 2008

XBOX 360

1 – **Battlefield: Bad Company** (EA)
2 – **Beijing 2008** (Sega)
3 – **Grand Theft Auto IV** (Rockstar)
4 – **Alone In The Dark** (Atari)
5 – **The Bourne Conspiracy** (Vivendi)

WII

1 – **Wii Fit** (Nintendo)
2 – **Mario Kart Wii** (Nintendo)
3 – **Big Beach Sports** (THQ)
4 – **Wii Play** (Nintendo)
5 – **Carnival: Funfair Games** (Take Two)

PSP

1 – **Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII** (Square Enix)
2 – **Wall-E** (THQ)
3 – **Lego Indiana Jones** (Activision)
4 – **God Of War: Chains Of Olympus** (Sony)
5 – **Secret Agent Clank** (Sony)

MUSIC

1 – **Sex On Fire** (Kings Of Leon)
2 – **I Kissed A Girl** (Katy Perry)
3 – **Thank You For A Lifetime** (Cliff Richard)
4 – **When I Grow Up** (Pussycat Dolls)
5 – **Disturbia** (Rihanna)

THIS MONTH IN…

games™

"Both men – Marcus Fenix and whoever this great brute from *Unreal Tournament* was – were, save for a pair of goggles, the same man," says US columnist Gray Nicholson, who laments the, "American-beefcake design epidemic."

Edge

Why has Nintendo seemingly abandoned the hardcore audience? *Edge* offers ten explanations, including, "Focussing on hardcore users didn't work last time around," and, "Making Nintendo games for hardcore gamers is difficult."

nRevolution

"What I've found recently is that first-party titles are soooo much better than anything else coming out on the system," writes reader Kev Whistler. "Are Ninty the only people who can develop for the Wii properly? I hope not."

Fantasy World Dizzy

BEAT ME, WHISK ME

» RETROREVIVAL

» ZX SPECTRUM » 1989 » THE OLIVER TWINS

Have you ever heard that one joke that American gamers tell about British retro games? It might be worded in different ways, but it always boils down to something along the lines of, "Those Brits choose odd things as characters, name them weirdly and then make them inexplicably vulnerable to raindrops." There's some truth to it, but it gets tiresome coming from people who evidently have no love for what they're mocking, and that poor old egg Dizzy tends to get beaten more than most in these jokes.

Americans tend to remember Dizzy because he appeared on the NES, and because he's a mascot character starring in a platform game, they're expecting a game more like *Mario*. The problem with that thinking is that *Dizzy*'s game design, with its slower pace and greater emphasis on puzzle-solving, is there for a reason – it was meant for home computers that don't handle smooth scrolling and fast sprite movement. Try to do a *Mario* game on a home computer, and you end up with something awkward like *Super Mario Bros Special* by Hudson Soft. What's more, while we all love action games, I feel as though the stronger computer culture in the UK and Europe simply made the audience more receptive to less action-oriented games.

I'm not saying that the *Dizzy* games are *Mario*-beaters or anything like that, just that they were the right games for the audience and the hardware. It saddens me to see them, and home-computer games of the era in general, dismissed so readily. That's why, while I'm more of a console kid than many of **Retro Gamer**'s contributors, I've always appreciated the fact that **Retro Gamer** is written from a distinctly British perspective – it's nice to have a space where love for the foundational games of our scene won't be drowned out. ✱

ZYU II 01

ANQUET HALL

INSIDE THE PlaySta

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO SONY LAUNCHED A CONSOLE THAT ENCOURAGED DEVELOPERS TO DREAM BIG, AND CAUSED THEM THE ODD NIGHTMARE. SPEAKING WITH DEVELOPERS WHO TACKLED ITS TRICKY TECHNOLOGY, WE DISCOVER WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO CREATE GAMES FOR A CONSOLE THAT TRULY TRANSFORMED WHAT WAS POSSIBLE IN VIDEOGAMES

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

PlayStation®2

Few consoles in the history of videogames have had the impact of the original PlayStation. It wasn't the first console to offer 3D graphics and CD-ROM technology, but it was a highly capable machine that was much easier for developers to work with than Sega's overly complex Saturn, and cheaper for players to buy. Though the Nintendo 64 had a clear advantage in overall power, the CD-ROMs used by Sony's console offered storage capacity that cartridge-based N64 games couldn't match, as well as cheaper games for consumers. By the end of 1998, the success of the PlayStation had catapulted Sony ahead of Nintendo and Sega into a position of market leadership, and with 50 million units sold it was well on its way to becoming the best-selling home console of all time.

Sony's rivals weren't taking that success lightly, and Sega had already launched the Dreamcast in Japan. Excitement grew to see how Sony would respond, and on 2 March 1999, Sony announced a "next generation PlayStation system" – not yet known as the PlayStation 2. Sony claimed that the hardware "massively increases the quality and performance of graphics technology to the maximum level that can be enjoyed on a television set" and possessed "the revolutionary ability to generate worlds, characters, behaviours and complex physical simulations in real-time via the massive floating-point processing power of the system".

The manufacturer explained that the system was capable of calculating digital wind that would affect characters' clothes and hair in real-time, and could perform "accurate simulation of different materials such as water, wood, metal and gas" as well as gravity, friction and mass. "This concept is called 'Emotion Synthesis' which allows the system to simulate not just how the images look, but how the characters and objects in a game think, act and behave," the press release explained. "Imagine walking into the screen and experiencing a movie in real-time … this is the world we are about to enter." Developers would get their development kits, enabling them to get to work on delivering Sony's lofty promises, in the spring of 1999.

Various developers produced tech demos to show off what the new system could do. Squaresoft showed a real-time version of Squall and Rinoa's dance sequence from *Final Fantasy VIII*, and a brawler that would later become *The Bouncer*. Namco contributed a brief catwalk sequence starring *Ridge Racer*'s Reiko Nagase, as well as a *Tekken* fight sequence in which Jin and Paul fought in a full 3D arena surrounded by cheering spectators. An enormous amount of hype built up prior to the launch of the PlayStation 2 over the year that followed, with the system eventually launching in Japan on 4 March 2000, to be followed by North American and European launches on 26 October and 24 November respectively.

Of course, you likely know how the story goes from there. The PS2 is still the world's best-selling home console, and amassed an eclectic and excellent library of games over its lifespan. However, the immense hype led to initial disappointment – speaking to *Edge* shortly before the North American launch of the console, Lorne Lanning of Oddworld Inhabitants expressed his opinion that early games were "far from impressive relative to public expectations of the system". His studio was working on *Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee* for the console at that time, and as he saw it, the problem was the hardware. "Our experience, as well as that of all the developers that we've talked with, is that ▶

JIM BULMER

■ The Getaway, *The Getaway: Black Monday*

CHUN WAH KONG

■ *The Getaway*, *The Getaway: Black Monday*

DUGAN JACKSON

■ *2002 FIFA World Cup*, *Vietcong: Purple Haze*

JULIAN SCOTT

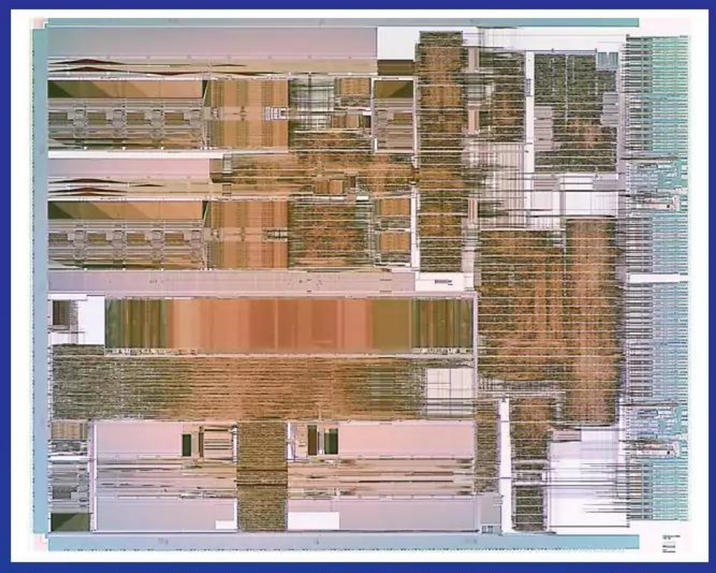
■ *Starsky & Hutch*

RICHARD MARKS

■ EyeToy

» [PlayStation 2] *Ridge Racer*'s Reiko Nagase was the star of an early tech demo by Namco.

» [PlayStation 2] This tech demo shows off terrain that has been procedurally generated, rather than using pre-defined geometry.



» Here's a look at the innards of the Emotion Engine, containing the console's CPU and more.

it is a difficult system to program for," he claimed, adding, "You wind up spending a lot of time and money in areas that you expected to be available in basic hardware functionality and dev system tools." The studio eventually abandoned the console in favour of Microsoft's Xbox.

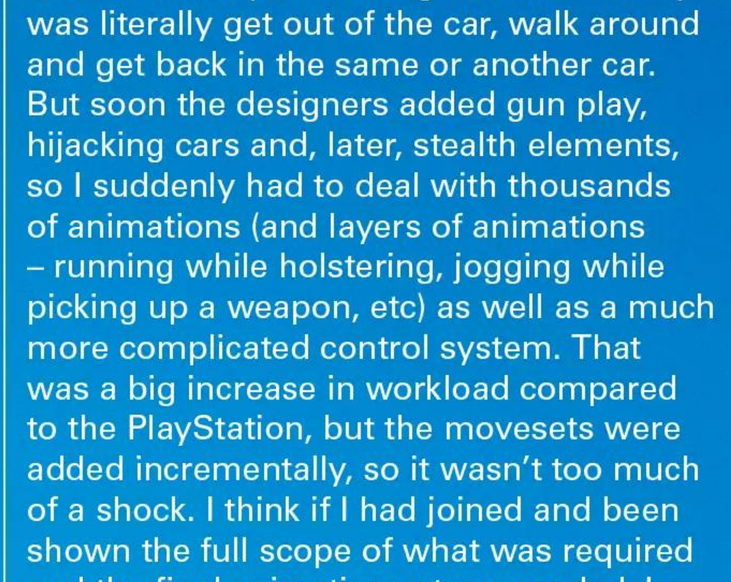
Steve Ellis of Free Radical Design, also speaking to *Edge*, conceded that, "Given the complexity of the hardware, it will take time before people produce games that do the system justice." However, he was more positive, saying, "I think a lot of developers have had problems because they tried to port over their PC engines and found that you need to do things in a fundamentally different way on the PS2. Sure, it's difficult to program for, but if that bothers you, you're in the wrong job." Referring to his studio's game *TimeSplitters*, he said, "We've been able to make every decision based on what would be best for a PS2 game, and I think the results speak for themselves." The first-person shooter was one of the most warmly received early releases for the console.

As predicted, more ambitious software was in the works and it did take a while to arrive. The truth is that it wasn't just difficult to adjust to the new hardware, but the increased player expectations that came with the more capable machine vastly increased the scope of PlayStation 2 projects compared to PlayStation games. "The change in format had a massive effect on the ambition of *The Getaway*," says Chun Wah Kong, lead designer on *The Getaway* – a project that transitioned from the original machine to the PS2. "The game which preceded *The Getaway* on the PlayStation was conceived as a traditional arcade lap-based racer. However, after a project review we transitioned to a narrative-driven experience featuring city driving, a cops-and-robbers theme, with an on-rails third-person gallery shooter for the interior sections. From that *The Getaway* was born."

Prior to working on *The Getaway*, programmer Jim Bulmer had worked on a PlayStation project at Codemasters. "On *Prince Naseem Boxing* we had only about five programmers, so we were forced to multi-task. I was in charge of the player controls (including the animations), as well as the camera, front-end menus, including character selection screens and loading the assets," he recalls. "Because of the increase in size and scope of the PS2 titles, jobs started to become more specialised," he continues. "We had double the number of programmers and I was basically just allocated one task, the player character/controls. This turned out to be a large task, encompassing shooting, dealing with environment context and animations, as well as animation management, but it was essentially one area of the project. Someone else handled AI, someone else handled the menus, sound, vehicles, etc.

"When I joined it was basically a driving game but then they decided they wanted the player to get out of the car and walk around. I was put in charge of this. Initially it was literally get out of the car, walk around and get back in the same or another car. But soon the designers added gun play, hijacking cars and, later, stealth elements, so I suddenly had to deal with thousands of animations (and layers of animations – running while holstering, jogging while picking up a weapon, etc) as well as a much more complicated control system. That was a big increase in workload compared to the PlayStation, but the movesets were added incrementally, so it wasn't too much of a shock. I think if I had joined and been shown the full scope of what was required and the final animation set we needed, I would have run away!"

"The game I worked on before *The Getaway* was *Lander* for Psygnosis, developed by a team of about 15 people over two years," says Chun. "In contrast, *The Getaway* had a team of around 60 people at our office in Soho. That doesn't include all the behind-the-scenes people and consultants who helped us cast over



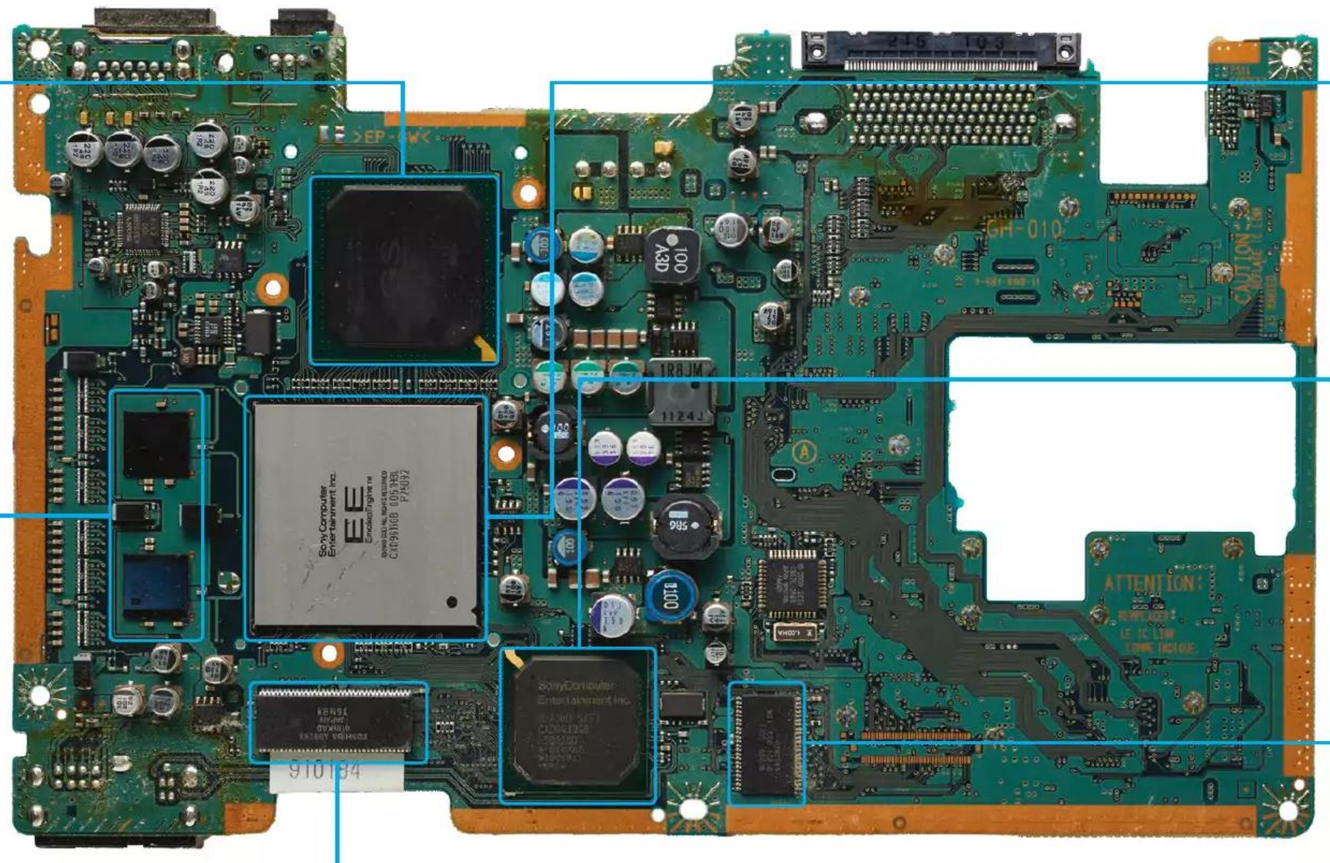
» This is what's inside the Graphics Synthesizer, the PS2's polygon-drawing powerhouse.

» [PlayStation 2] Launch game *Fantavision* looked good and played well, but players expected more from the hardware.

» [PlayStation 2] Online games like *Twisted Metal: Black* were present early on, but networking required an add-on before the slim PS2.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

THE KNOWLEDGE YOU NEED ON THE CHIPS THAT POWER YOUR PLAYSTATION 2



GRAPHICS SYNTHESIZER

■ The graphical processor of the PS2 is clocked at 150MHz and contains 4MB of embedded DRAM. It has a very fast fill-rate of 1.2 gigpixels per second, with Z-buffer, alpha blending and textures.

32MB RDRAM

■ This is the main memory for the console, and is set up as two 16MB chips with a dual channel bus – each 16-bit, clocked at 400MHz.

2MB RAM

■ This chip is memory dedicated to the I/O processor.

EMOTION ENGINE

■ The CPU of the PlayStation 2, which also contains both vector units, the DMA controller and the Image Processing Unit (IPU) that is responsible for fast decoding of MPEG-2 data.

I/O PROCESSOR

■ This 32-bit MIPS-3000 processor handles controller and USB inputs, memory card usage and more. It's the same CPU as used in the original PlayStation, and is also used for backwards compatibility.

DVD ROM

■ This 4MB chip contains the DVD player software for the console. The earliest model of the console didn't include this, so player software had to be installed on the user's memory card.

EXPANSION CONNECTOR

■ This is used to connect the PS2 Network Adaptor, which adds an Ethernet port and a connector for an IDE hard disk. Earlier models featured a PCMCIA slot and didn't include the expansion bay.

POWER BOARD CONNECTOR

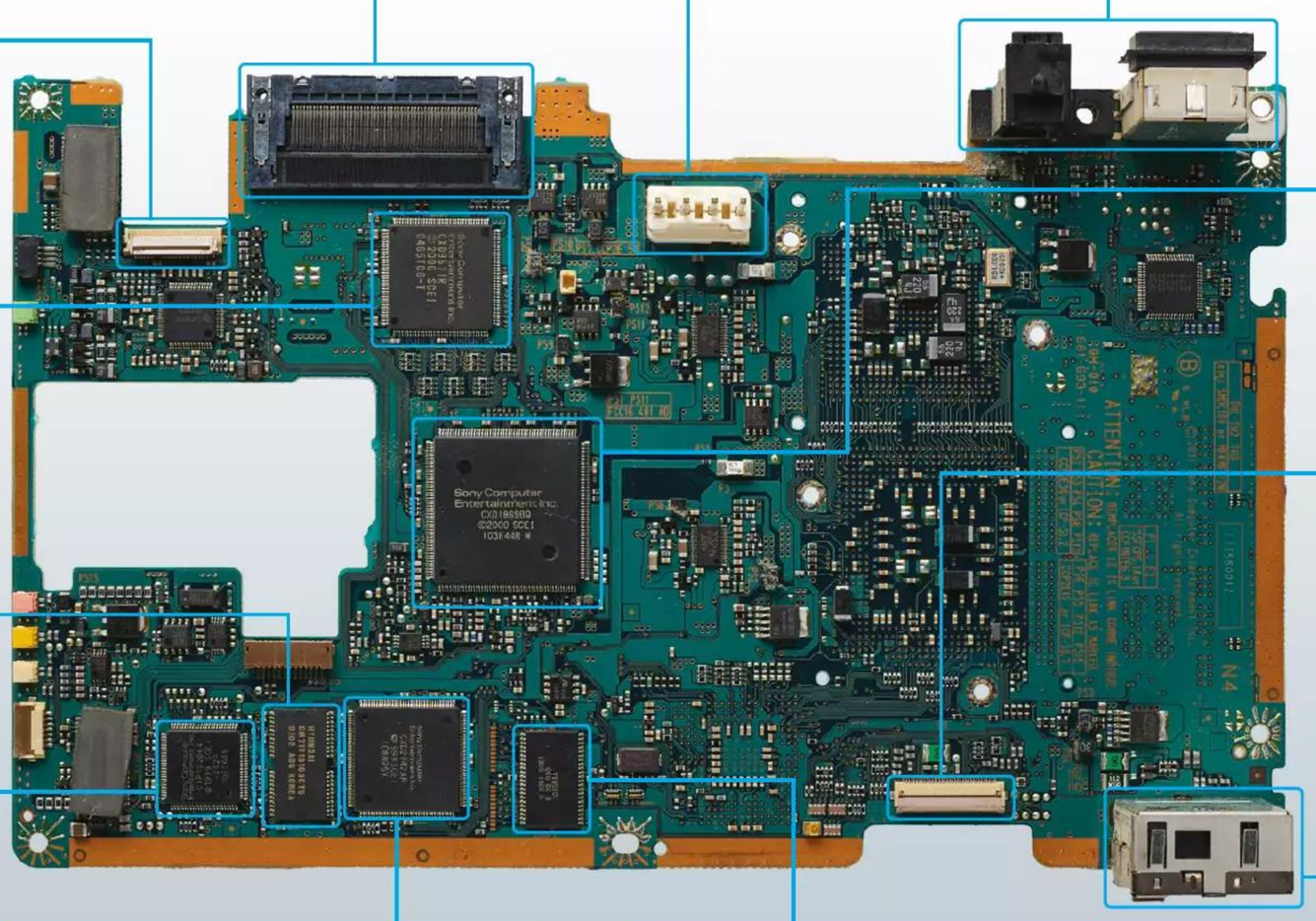
■ Power supply hardware is found on a secondary circuit board, which is connected to the main motherboard here. The cutout section above it is where the system's cooling fan sits.

DVD DRIVE CONNECTOR

■ The system's DVD drive is connected via a ribbon cable. It reads DVD-ROM at 4x speed and CD-ROMs at 24x speed. The high CD-ROM read speed can be utilised to load PlayStation games faster.

AV CONNECTIONS

■ Sony's custom AV multi-out port allows for composite, S-video, RGB and component video output from a single port. A TOSLINK port provides digital output for high-quality audio.



HARD DISK CONTROLLER

■ Used to interface with the hard disk when installed.

DSP

■ The Digital Signal Processor is used for processing signals from the DVD drive.

CONTROLLER/MEMORY CARD PORT CONNECTOR

■ These essential ports are connected to the motherboard by a ribbon cable. Games tend to happily use both PlayStation and PS2 controllers, but you'll need appropriate memory cards for each format.

2 MB RAM

■ Another memory chip, dedicated to the SPU2.

MECHACON

■ This chip controls the DVD drive mechanism, but also fulfils a range of other functions including game disc security and MagicGate memory card security.

SPU2

■ Responsible for the system's audio, the Sound Processing Unit 2 improves on the original PlayStation's audio with 48 channels and support for 48KHz sample rates.

BIOS ROM

■ This 4MB ROM chip contains the console's system software, which you'll use when managing memory card data and changing system settings such as the date, time and video output format.

USB PORTS

■ Two USB ports, using the USB 1.1 standard, used to connect peripherals such as the EyeToy. This revision of the hardware has already removed the iLink port that was situated next to them.

» [PlayStation 2] This blur effect was added for the PS2 version of *Dead Or Alive 2*, showcasing its special effects prowess.

» [PlayStation 2] Treasure coaxed this unusual pencil shading effect from the console for *Freak Out*.

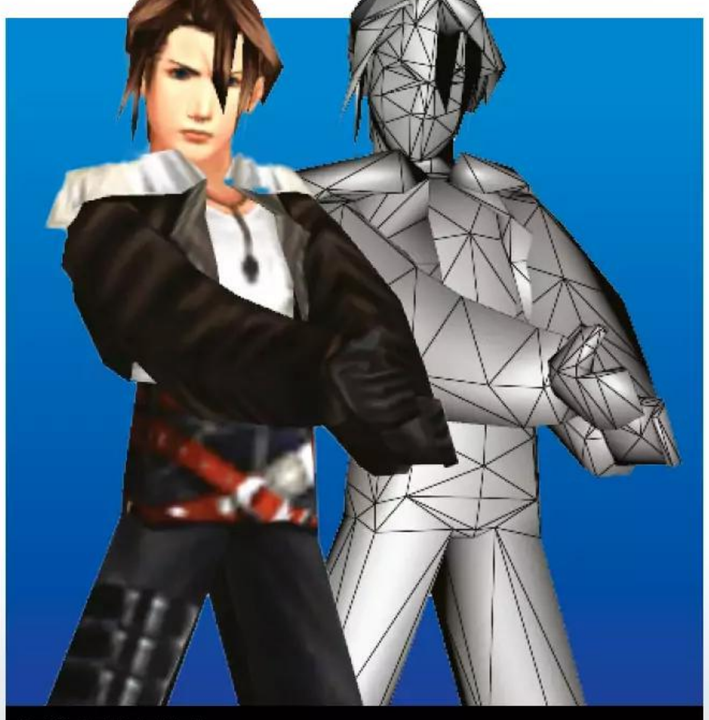
» [PlayStation 2] The *Final Fantasy VIII* tech demo promised in-game visuals on par with PlayStation FMV.

▶ a dozen actors. We worked alongside a motion-capture company, costume and make-up, stunt people, the legal and licensing department that secured cars, locations and cross-promotions with clothing brands," he recalls. "We also collaborated with police consultants, weapons specialists; voice actors in various languages; the London Sessions Orchestra. I haven't mentioned all our hard-working producers and testers from all the different territories. I'm sure I've overlooked quite a few others. In total, there were easily a few hundred people involved, while I probably only met half of them. It was a quantum leap from *Lander*, which had been completed just three years earlier."

***The Getaway* was a first-party project that represented the high end of developer ambition, but even less elaborate productions involved longer development time and more staff than before.** Julian Scott, who was a programmer on *Starsky & Hutch* and its cancelled sequel at Mind's Eye Productions, says, "I think we had maybe eight programmers on these games, so not massive. At least three or four worked on tooling, as we were writing the engine/editor

MODEL STUDENT

WHAT CAN CHARACTER MODELS TEACH US ABOUT THE 3D GRUNT OF THE PS2 AND ITS PREDECESSOR?



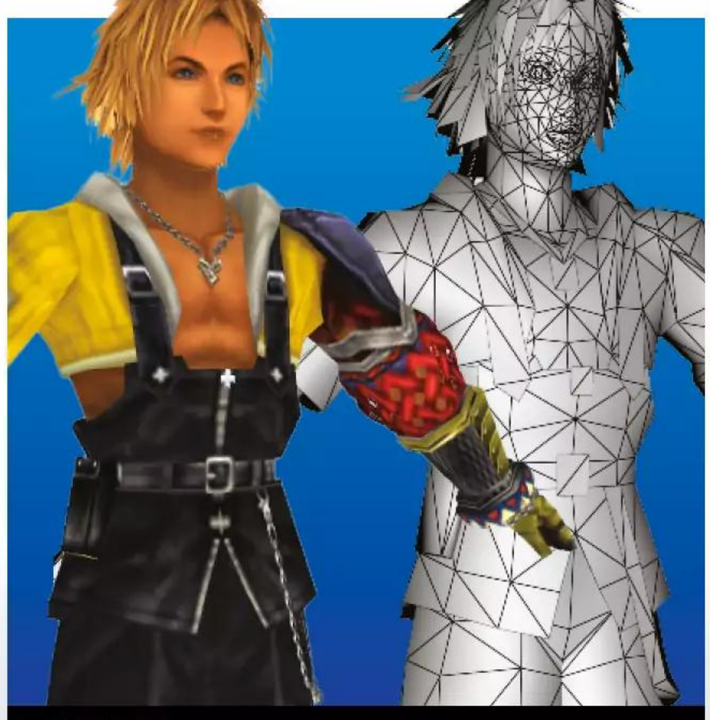
SQUALL

FINAL FANTASY VIII 1999

STATS

903 TRIANGLES
TWO TEXTURES (BOTH 128X128)

■ *Final Fantasy VIII* was considered to be one of the most attractive PlayStation games in its day, drawing praise for adopting a more realistic and detailed art style than its predecessor.



TIDUS IN-GAME

FINAL FANTASY X, 2001

STATS

3012 TRIANGLES
ONE TEXTURE (256X256)

■ Thanks to the power of the PlayStation 2, Tidus sports a character model that blows his predecessor out of the water, with over three times the polygonal detail and twice the texture detail.

TIDUS CUTSCENE

FINAL FANTASY X, 2001

STATS

9749 TRIANGLES
TWO TEXTURES (512X256 AND 256X256)

■ Outside of gameplay, the PS2 can handle a significantly more-detailed model, allowing the use of real-time graphics for cutscenes rather than the pre-rendered FMV sequences of the PlayStation game.

» [PlayStation 2] It took a while, but *Tekken 4* delivered on the vision of the earlier tech demo.

stuff from scratch too. On the actual PS2 side we maybe had three who were actually doing anything performance-critical." His previous projects on the PlayStation and Dreamcast had "perhaps half the staff".

For artist Dugan Jackson, it depended on the project. "*2002 FIFA World Cup* was the first time for me working with a larger team. We were doing the back end of the game for EA Vancouver and the team really had to be ramped up with a mix of existing employees and new hires," he recalls. "Development time was a big change too. The previous title I worked on was *Tweenies* for PlayStation which was a crazy four or five-month duration. That meant very little time for polish or revision. On *FIFA* we not only were working to a higher hardware spec, but also having more thorough progress reviews both internally and with EA to ensure we pushed the quality level of every aspect we were dealing with." There was still room for smaller projects, though. "The next PS2 title I worked on, *MTV Music Generator 3*, was a much smaller team of three coders and two artists, and we built that all from scratch with no pre-existing game engine."

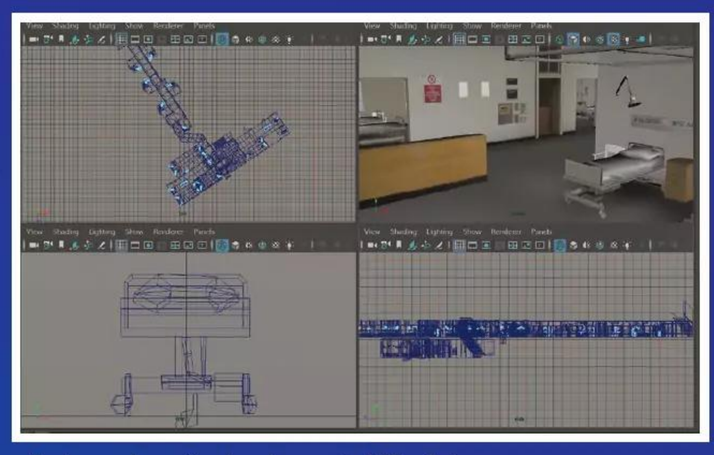
To realise their ambitions, teams had to tame the 'Emotion Engine', which contained the system's MIPS R-5900-based CPU, clocked at 294MHz. "I wrote most of the underlying game engine code, and there

» [PlayStation 2] The *Starsky & Hutch* development team underestimated the polygon-pushing power of the console.

» [PlayStation 2] *Final Fantasy X* showed that the console could handle plenty of detailed models simultaneously.

was a lot of trial and error, working out how to make the most of the machine," says Julian. "One thing I remember fondly is the 'precache' instruction on the CPU which unlocked an awful lot of optimisation potential. With modern CPUs the thing 'intelligently' reads what it thinks will be the next data used in to the local cache. This didn't exist on the Emotion Engine, but you could manually tell it to get some data ready for you, whilst working on the current batch. Similarly the CPU had 16KB of fast scratchpad memory, so writing code to deal with small chunks like that was necessary. I know that when we converted to PC, we just emulated that code, which was perfectly fast enough on PCs."

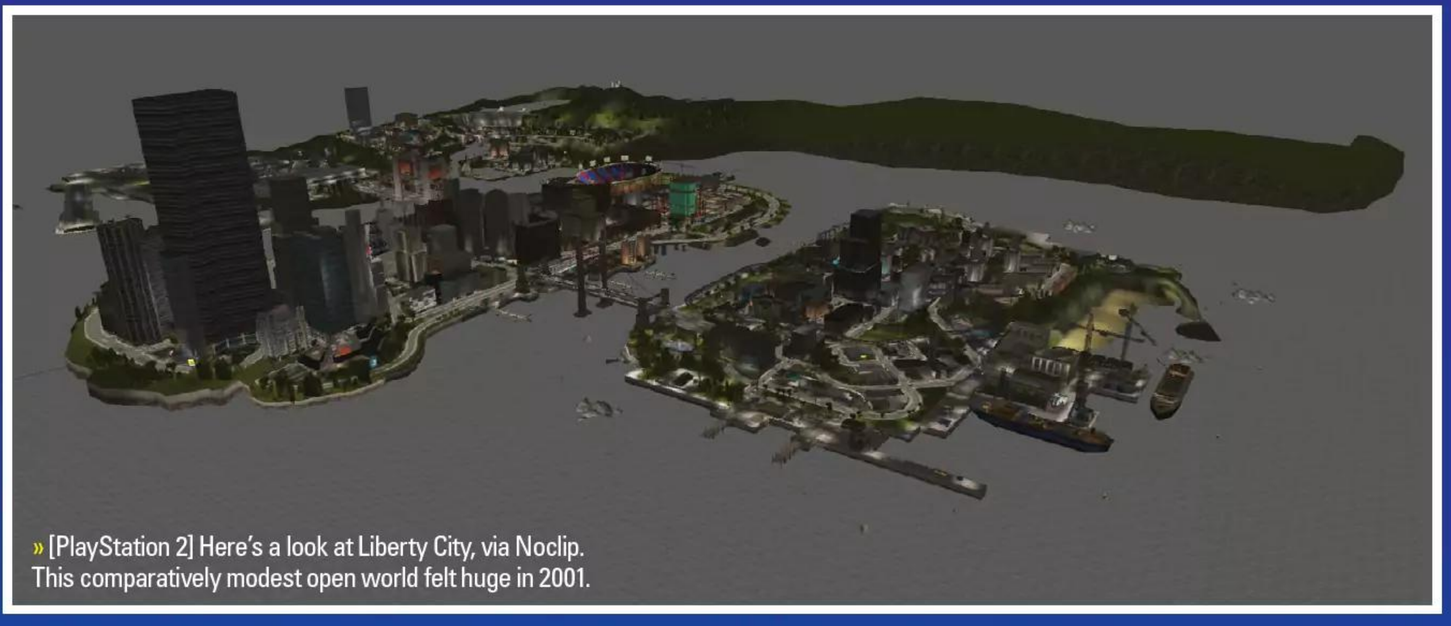
The PS2 was a polygon-pushing monster thanks to its Graphics Synthesizer chip, capable of enormous leaps in detail compared to PlayStation games. By the time of Sony's 2003 developer presentation, the platform holder claimed that "most recent games" were drawing over 50,000 polygons per frame, and that the fastest it had seen was pushing 125,000 polygons per frame at 60fps. However, getting the best from the console involved making effective use of the two vector unit co-processors in the Emotion Engine, which specialised in floating point operations crucial to 3D graphics and freed up the CPU for other tasks. These units, named VU0 and VU1, were also efficient in procedural generation. In 2002, Sony challenged programmers to produce demos using just the 16KB memory available to VU1, and the results ▶



» An image from the development of *The Getaway*, showing the hospital in 3D package Maya.

» [PlayStation 2] Here's the exterior of King's Cross station, as seen in the London of the real world.

» [PlayStation 2] Now here's the model of the station, created for use in *The Getaway*. Convincing, right?



» [PlayStation 2] Here's a look at Liberty City, via Noclip. This comparatively modest open world felt huge in 2001.

THE MIDDLEMEN

WHY ONE PIECE OF MIDDLEWARE DEFINED THE PS2 GENERATION

One name that will likely be familiar to any PlayStation 2 fan is RenderWare. You'll have seen the name in the start-up screens of plenty of popular games, but what is it and why was it so popular? RenderWare is a type of middleware – a game engine developed by Criterion Software, which was a subsidiary of Canon, best known for its photographic products. It had initially been introduced as a graphics engine in 1993 and was later used in Criterion's own Dreamcast games. It became exceptionally popular on the PS2 because creating a 3D engine for the PlayStation 2 was a difficult task, which proved to be a particular pain point for developers early in the life of the console.

Speaking to *Edge* in 2000, Criterion's David Lau-Kee summarised the value proposition for studios by saying, "There are lots of smart people out there, they'll get their heads around it. The question is, do you want them to be spending all their time getting their heads around it?" With the console's capabilities and complexity already driving team sizes, development times and budgets up, plenty of developers agreed. Hundreds of PS2 games used RenderWare, including Criterion's own *Burnout* series, the *Grand Theft Auto* trilogy and *Sonic Heroes*. In a 2002 interview with *Game Informer*, Neversoft's Scott Pease even credited the engine for allowing the team to ship *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* on time.

By 2004 RenderWare had grown to offer physics and audio solutions too, and had become hugely important for not only PS2 development, but for its GameCube, Xbox and PC support that simplified multi-platform development. Criterion was purchased by Electronic Arts that year, and RenderWare was part of the deal. Though EA committed to continuing to license the engine, *Edge* noted that, "The problem for publishers is that these titles are now dependent on intellectual property owned by their biggest rival." In the end, it didn't matter much – RenderWare 4 never made it to market as EA felt that it underperformed on next-generation hardware, and developers instead moved to other engines such as Epic's Unreal Engine 3.

» [PlayStation 2] You may well recognise this logo, which appeared in early PS2 games like *Grand Theft Auto III*.

» [PlayStation 2] Criterion's own *Burnout Revenge* was a potent demonstration of what RenderWare could do.

» [PlayStation 2] *Mortal Kombat: Armageddon* is just one of the many popular games that uses RenderWare.

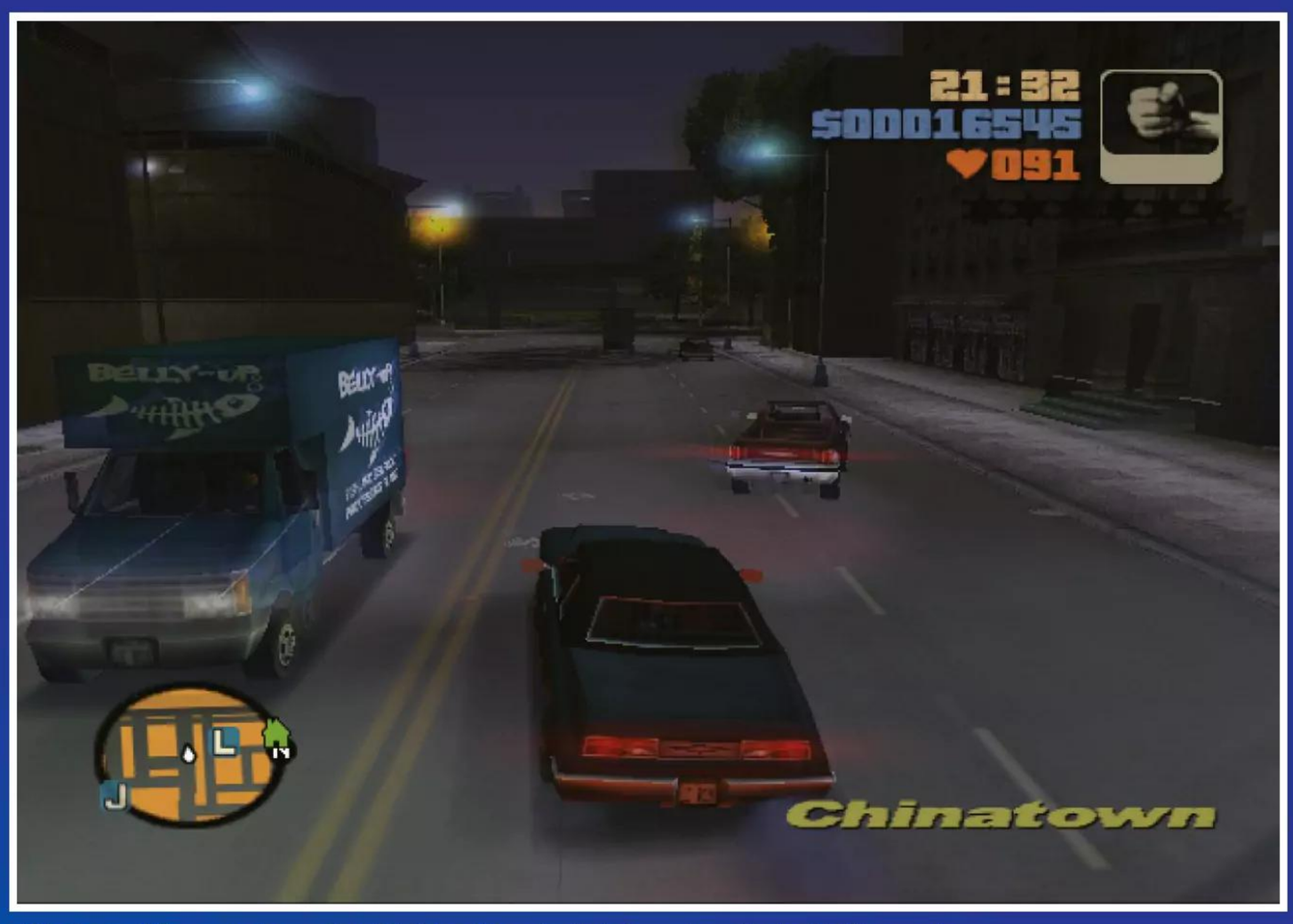
» [PlayStation 2] As the generation went on, in-engine cutscenes supplanted FMV sequences in games like *Kingdom Hearts II*.

included some amazing special effects including water simulations and a puppet model with ragdoll physics. Sony Computer Entertainment Europe stressed the importance of effective vector unit usage in a 2003 presentation to developers, noting that most games still weren't using VU0 and that the "best performing titles tend to use VU0 quite a bit".

The console's graphical power wasn't well understood early on, as Julian admits. "For *Starsky & Hutch* we had to come up with some polygon budgets early on for characters and buildings in the game. We seriously underestimated how much we could render, though. Better to be on the safe side, but it's why the characters in this game look a bit more PlayStation than PS2." And for as fast as the Graphics Synthesizer was when it came to drawing polygons and special effects, it did have limitations. A major one was the 4MB of video RAM on board – a relatively small amount that limited space for textures. "I remember that," says Dugan, "and also coders repeatedly telling us no long thin polygons! I think it was due to how they were clipped when going off-screen. It was better to subdivide your meshes, as the console could handle the extra polygons."

Another major limitation of the system was the way in which it handled anti-aliasing, as early games had a distinctly jagged look to polygon edges. An

» [PlayStation 2] Dugan worked as the kits lead on *2002 FIFA World Cup*, showing the specialisation of roles.



» [PlayStation 2] For many players, *Grand Theft Auto III* was the kind of experience that justified the console.

anonymous developer explained to *Edge* that, "The PlayStation 2 does support hardware anti-aliasing. However, it is unlikely to be used in most games because every polygon in a scene needs to be distance sorted. Distance sorting was a necessity on the original PlayStation because there was no Z-buffer, but with the high poly counts handled by the PlayStation 2 it isn't feasible for most games." The developer further claimed, "There has been a lot of talk recently about certain developers having found a near-zero cost solution to the 'anti-aliasing bug', or of Sony having provided examples to developers. The technique that is being used is fundamentally different to anti-aliasing – it is a full-screen blur. Yes, it's fast, but the result is a blurry game with still clearly visible aliasing."

» [PlayStation 2] The PS2 handles this rainy scene in *Metal Gear Solid 2* with ease, while the Xbox struggles.

Not all of the graphical advances were down to sheer drawing grunt though – some were a simple matter of developer ambition. "I remember Brendan McNamara (or Chun) would come up with complicated designs or features they wanted and it was down to the programmers and artists to make it work," Jim explains. "One particular example would be the stairs. I remember many 'discussions' about that. Brendan was insistent on the game being like a movie and 'immersive', and therefore when going up or down stairs the characters feet *had* to connect and land on the steps. He was very adamant about this and it caused some friction at the time.

"This was a particular nightmare to code," Jim continues. "We were using inverse kinematics for leg and arm movement (aiming the weapons for example), so I remember designing a stair system where the stairs had to be marked out a specific way and each step had a set height – although I think we might also have had 'steep' stairs, and even spiral stairs – and then I'd have to calculate which step the foot was nearest to and match and move the foot position to it. This kind of thing wouldn't have been considered on the PlayStation, partly because no-one would have noticed due to screen resolution, but also processing of inverse kinematics to handle going up stairs would have been seen as a waste of CPU time. But with the PS2 and its increased power, things like this could be thought about and attempted, so despite the 'arguments' at the time, it was worth it in the end."

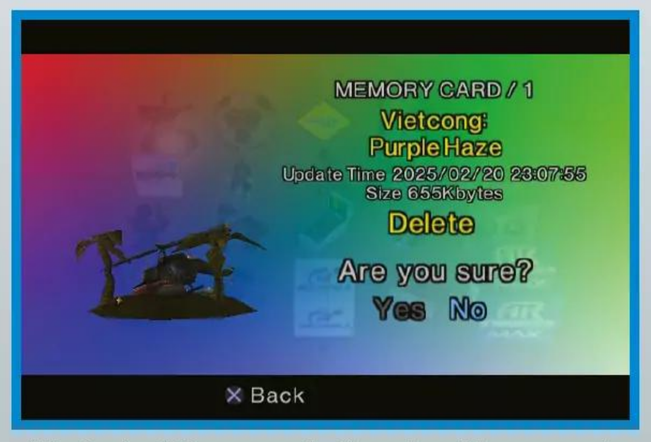
VISUAL MEMORY

DUGAN JACKSON EXPLAINS ONE OF THE CONSOLE'S QUIRKY FEATURES

If you spent a lot of time with the PS2, there's a good chance you have fond memories of its memory card screen – whereas most consoles used simple 2D icons to represent save files, the PS2 went a step further and actually offered 3D icons, which gave an extra sense of personality. The fun didn't stop there though, as the icons could be animated and even have an extra look for when a file was about to be deleted. "I'm not sure if any console had them as complex since the PS2," says Dugan, who created them for games including *Vietcong: Purple Haze*. "Personally I always appreciated other games which put in the effort to make interesting save icons on PS2."

Of course, to prevent these models from taking up enormous space on the memory card, there were rules involved in creating them. "We used an exporter plug-in for 3DSMax which was supplied by Sony. In the readme was a basic list of restrictions," says Dugan. "Animations can only have one, four, six or eight keyframes. The model can either be textured or untextured, but not a mixture, and the same goes for shading (either gouraud or flat-shaded). Polygon count limit was relative to the animation – one keyframe (no animation) would allow 600 polys, but 8 keyframes was limited to 400 polys. If you wanted it textured, a texture had to be 128x128."

» [PlayStation 2] Here's Dugan's save icon for *Vietcong: Purple Haze*, a nice hovering helicopter.



» [PlayStation 2] Go to erase the file, and you'll be presented with a crashed, burning chopper instead.

INVENTING THE EYETOY

DR RICHARD MARKS EXPLAINS HOW THE POPULAR MOTION-CONTROL PERIPHERAL CAME TO BE

Though the Wii is often recognised for appealing to casual players and families thanks to its use of alternative input methods, the PS2 was no slouch in that regard thanks to peripherals like the EyeToy, a webcam that could track the motion of players. The device was conceived by Dr Richard Marks, a computer vision expert whose parents had owned a videogame store, during a trip to the Game Developers Conference. "When I saw the PS2 specs, I immediately thought that it might be good for computer vision, and I also thought it was unlikely anyone else would try to do that, so I dropped my resume at the Sony booth," he recalls. "When they reached out, I visited and told them all the things I would want to try, and they offered me a job!

"I decided early on that to do computer vision, fighting for the resources used by graphics folks (the vector units) might be a bad idea, because graphics are so important to games. So, I focussed on using different parts of the hardware: the core CPU and the IPU. I also had to learn how to write USB camera drivers, since PS2 didn't have support for that." In his previous job at Teleos Research, Richard had learned a great deal about optimising image processing code, which aided him in writing software for the PS2. "The PS2 also has some truly amazing SIMD instructions on the core CPU that are ideal for video processing," he explains. "Intel had some similar instructions for Pentium called MMX which I was familiar with, but the PS2 instructions were even more powerful, and almost no one was using them. I spent a lot of time writing fast video filters like blur, edge detection, background subtraction, etc, kind of like real-time Photoshop."

Despite the high power of the console for its time, there were plenty of limitations. "We were really focussed on 60fps for PS2, so I focussed on that as a target, which was really challenging given we only had USB1.1 which had an effective max of 8Mbits/sec," Richard tells us. "So I decided to sacrifice resolution for speed, and we mostly used 320x240 video even though the EyeToy hardware supported 640x480." That hardware was supplied by Omnivision, as Sony's own cameras were too high resolution and expensive to bundle with the software. "The PS2 hardware included the IPU to decode MPEG-2 for the purpose of DVD movie playback. Unfortunately, MPEG-2 decoding is complex and uses a lot of resources and has significant latency, and more importantly at the time there weren't any reasonably priced cameras that could output MPEG-2," says Richard. "But Omnivision's camera chip could output JPEG frames, and MPEG-2 includes something called I-frames which are very similar to JPEG. So Omnivision tweaked their chip firmware to output MPEG I-frames, and voila! Nearly free video stream decompression at 60fps!"

The team experimented with object tracking early on. A demonstration set in a medieaval chamber was created, controlled with coloured balls on wands. The demo, "Also included cool new graphics tech from Gabor Nagy and new simulation tech from Eric Larsen," Richard remembers. Unfortunately, a live on-stage demonstration during Sony's keynote presentation at GDC 2000 didn't work. "I had hard-coded the colour-tracking thresholds, and the lighting was different during the keynote versus rehearsal." A later prototype involving the camera tracking a wand for spellcasting in a traditional 3D game also failed to excite players. "When we playtested… my son hated it, and many people found it frustrating," Richard admits. "London Studio went back to the drawing board, and focussed on what they liked about the previous prototype experiences, and they brilliantly created *EyeToy Play*."

» Doesn't this ball on a wand look like a low-tech PlayStation Move controller?

» [PlayStation 2] Another example of object tracking, with the PS2 placing characters on different coloured balls.

» [PlayStation 2] You can see procedural terrain generation in action on the ground in the *3D Ages* version of *Space Harrier*.

One of the most famous features of the PS2 was its support for DVDs, and this wasn't just a selling point for people who wanted a cheap movie player. The 4.7GB capacity of a single-layer disc was a huge improvement over the 650MB available on a CD-ROM, and particularly massive games such as the *God Of War* titles utilised 8.5GB dual-layer discs. The result was that relatively few multi-disc games were released, although *Grandia III*, *Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams* and the second and third episodes of the *Xenosaga* series all came on two discs. Though the increased capacity was welcome, game designs were becoming more demanding on the disc drive – particularly with the rise of open-world game designs. "One of the hardest things we did was streaming the open world from DVD," says Julian, which he considers was "very difficult to get right".

Chun and Jim both cite this as the biggest technical challenge encountered in *The Getaway*, too. "You could drive around pretty much the entire city of London and obviously we couldn't have any pauses for loading as often you were being chased or chasing someone, and this would break the realism," Jim explains. "While the game ran perfectly on our devkits, we would receive bug reports that were specific to the oldest retail model of the PS2," Chun adds. "Character models disappearing from cutscenes, and big voids appearing in the environment with chunks of roads missing as the player drove at high speeds."

Drastic measures were considered to solve the problem. "As a possible remedy, we discussed allocating space for an ultra-low-detail version of everything to remain in the PS2's memory at all times. If the hardware couldn't load the high-res 3D models quickly enough, this would serve as a fallback," Chun continues. "However, sacrificing this memory would negatively impact the overall visual quality of the game. Would we fail QA if this bug cropped up once in a blue moon during submission? Working to the lowest denominator certainly had its challenges. But no, we tweaked a few things in the end and went for broke on the best visuals possible."

» [PlayStation 2] 2D games like *Guilty Gear XX* benefitted from the PS2's support for high resolutions.

Jim elaborates on how the problem was solved. "The disc access on the PS2 was fairly slow, especially the seek times, so my understanding (I didn't work on this part) is the map was broken up into grids of 250m x250m and grids in front of the camera were streamed in, while areas behind were kept in memory for a while until they were too far away. The car could do a U-turn, or the player if he was running around could just turn 180-degrees, so we couldn't delete them straight away," he explains. "The key solution for this was that the map data was stored sequentially on the disc, so that there was minimal need to seek on the disc as the adjacent areas in the map would be next, or very close on the physical disc. This vastly reduced any seeking time, so the map could be loaded in without hitching."

The struggles of PlayStation 2 development were ultimately worth it. The first year of releases might have been rough, but it wasn't long after the console's first anniversary that games which lived up to its potential began to arrive – games like *Gran Turismo 3*, *Final Fantasy X* and *Devil May Cry*. With them came the influx of players, and the incentive to persist with the tricky console. The GameCube and Xbox may have offered more raw grunt when they arrived in late-2001, and the Xbox was certainly friendlier to developers hoping to port their PC engines, but developers that worked to the strengths of the PS2 reaped the rewards. Compare the likes of *Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance* or *Silent Hill 2* to their Xbox ports, and you'll see that illustrated clearly – and of course, PS2 exclusives like *God Of War II* look as good as anything else released in that generation.

Julian sums it up best, saying, "The PS2 was by far the most powerful hardware any of us had worked on, most of us being around from 8-bit days, so it never felt weak at all. In fact it was incredible really!" It really was a huge technological leap of a kind we're unlikely to ever see again, and thanks to the hard work of the developers who created games for it, it remains the home to a library that offers both enormous breadth and plenty of quality. So here's to the PlayStation 2 – a tricky beast that was well worth taming. ✱

» [PlayStation 2] The hardware used to play DVD movies allows the PS2 to display background video with minimal performance impact.

» [PlayStation 2] Optimisation was important on the PS2, lest you get *Global Defence Force*'s low framerates.

» [PlayStation 2] *Xenosaga: Episode III* comes on two DVDs – though that's mostly because of its cutscenes.

» [PlayStation 2] *God Of War II* employs an on-rails camera system, helping it to pack in details.

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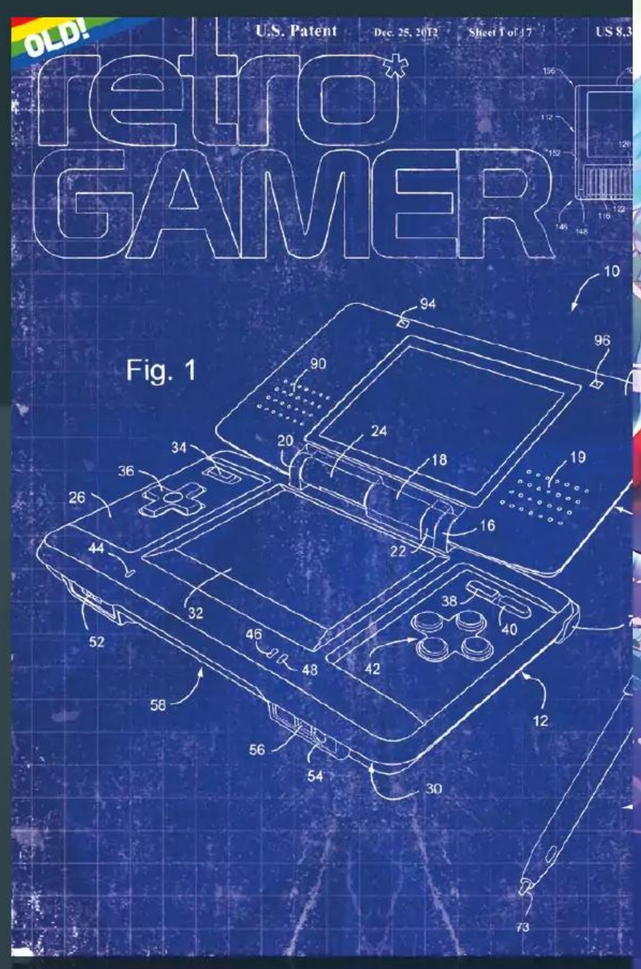

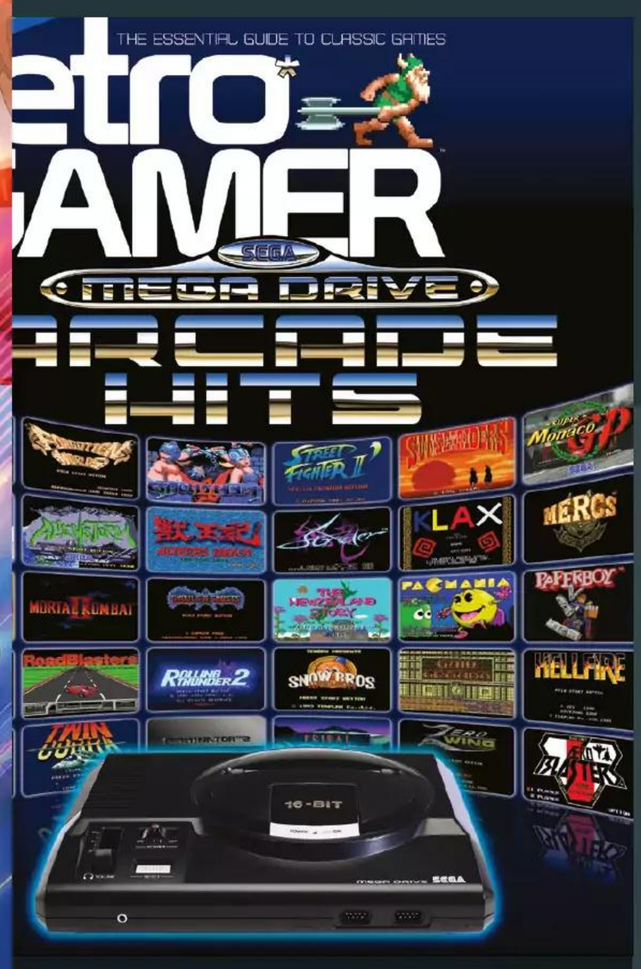

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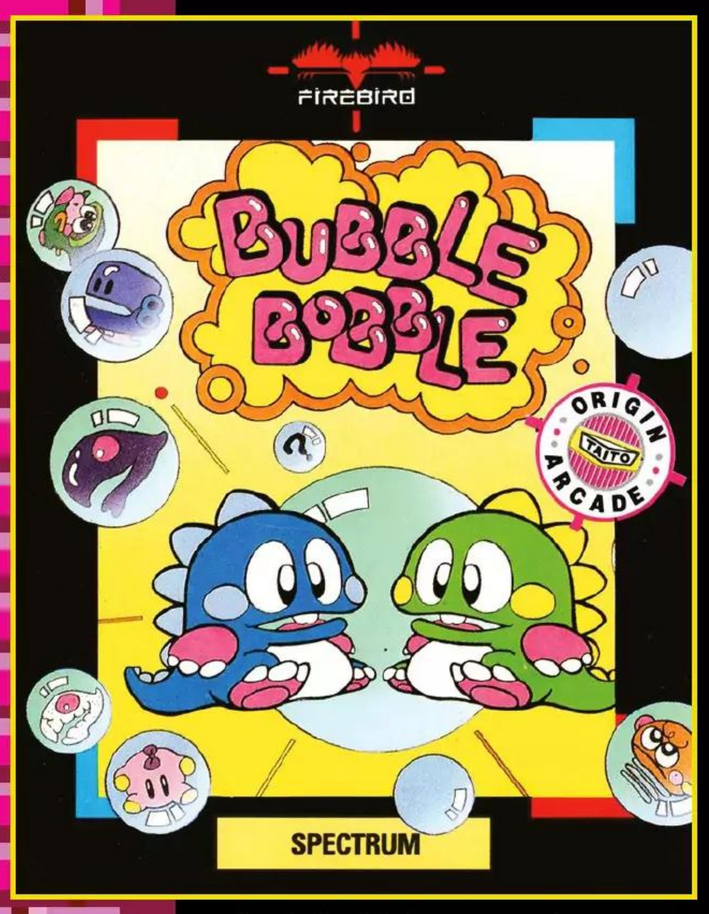
ULTIMATE GUIDE

BUBBLE BOBBLE

LET US JOURNEY INTO THE DEADLY CAVE OF MONSTERS ONE MORE TIME AS RETRO GAMER PRESENTS THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO TAITO'S MARVELLOUS BUBBLE-BLOWING EXTRAVAGANZA. CUE THE MUSIC...

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON



» Practically all the home conversions of *Bubble Bobble* are excellent.

Despite being responsible for the coin-op videogame that helped instigate the arcade revolution – *Space Invaders*, in case you were wondering – Taito was struggling by the mid-Eighties. A string of below-par or ill-received games had diluted the company's reputation, and it desperately needed a hit. Then, in 1986, thanks to newly joined designer Fukio Mitsuji, it got one, complete with a twisty denouement that even M Night Shyamalan would be proud of.

Bubble Bobble is the tale of two squat and cuddly dragons named Bub and Bob. Bub and Bob happily enjoy life with their puzzlingly human-like girlfriends when Baron Von Blubba kidnaps the lasses, ferreting them to the deepest, furthest grotto in the Cave Of Monsters. The scaly pair have no choice but to venture into the caverns, each infested, as the name suggests, with Baron Von Blubba's monstrous henchmen. An alternative plotline involves the girls wandering into a magical forest and stumbling into the Cave Of Monsters, whereupon they encounter Super Drunk, with the same result.

"[BUBBLE BOBBLE] WAS SOFTWARE CREATIONS' FIRST MULTI-PLATFORM LICENCE"
MIKE FOLLIN

Bub and Bob can jump and – yes! – blow bubbles. Should a bubble come in contact with an enemy monster, it encases them, instantly negating their mass and causing them to float helplessly around the screen. Left alone, eventually, the monsters escape their translucent prison; however, the dragons can pierce the bubbles (with either their pointy back scales or by jumping on them), sending the enemy spinning across the level. Once the pair have eliminated all the monsters, it's on

MASTER OF BUBBLES

RETRO GAMER'S TIPS TO HELP THOSE LOVEABLE HEROES AGAINST BUBBLE BOBBLE'S BATTERY OF MONSTERS

BUBBLE BOUNCING

Bub and Bob can use their bubbles to bounce to higher parts of the screen. As they progress through the Cave Of Monsters, this becomes a vital skill with more otherwise inaccessible areas, such as the question mark of level 36.

EXTEND YOUR LIFE

Watch out for the Letter Bubbles that drift around some stages. Collecting a letter transfers it to the side of the screen (depending on whether it's Bub or Bob) – catch them all, and the dragon gets a valuable extra life and flies off to the next screen.

RAPID FIRE

Dragon buff items appear when certain conditions are met. Our favourite is the yellow sweet: gather this treat up, and the brother gains rapid-fire bubbles, useful for the ever-increasing pack of monsters. Jump 35 times to cause it to appear.

SECRET ROOM

Completing *Bubble Bobble* with the Good Ending helps unlock Super Bubble Bobble mode. Providing the player doesn't lose a life, levels 20, 30 and 40 now contain doors to secret rooms full of items. Gather them all up for a sweet score bonus.

to the next screen, until a showdown with the game's humongous final boss, Super Drunk. Defeat him, and Bub and Bob are reunited with their girls. Ahhhh.

In the finest arcade gaming tradition, *Bubble Bobble* begins simply, with three platforms and a sprinkling of the easiest enemy, the mechanical Zen-Chan. However, as Bub and Bob progress, the enemies get tougher and meaner, and the levels become devilishly arranged, with inescapable gullies and multiple bubble-blocking platforms. Of the former, the ghostly Maita hurls rocks at the heroes while Monstas haphazardly zip around the screens. Pulpuls hover around thanks to their head-based rotors and the manic Banebous jump on their coiled springs. Latterly, the players will encounter the furry Hidegons and Invaders (harking back to Taito's biggest hit), and should Bub and Bob dawdle too long, they'll be hunted down by the dreaded Skel-Monster – sometimes referenced as Baron Von Blubba himself – an invincible monster preceded by the warning, "Hurry Up!" At this point, the regular enemies turn crimson in anger, and move faster around the screen. As

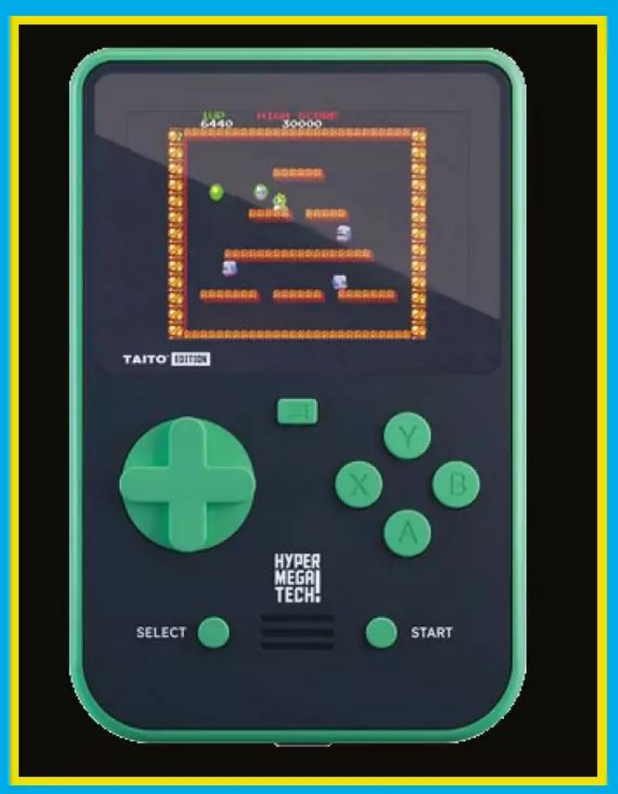
» [Arcade] Drunks can be troublesome in packs.

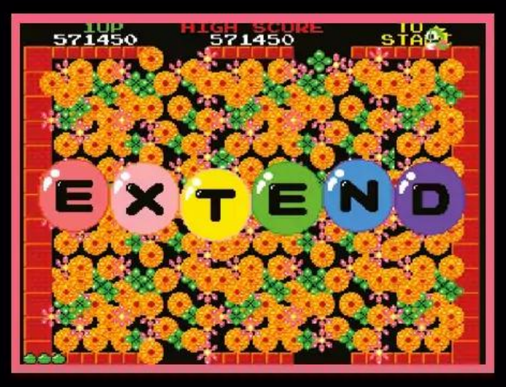
» [Arcade] Bub and Bob stand by as an explosion rocks stage 41.

PLAY TODAY

LOOKING FOR A BIT OF BUB AND BOB ACTION? HERE'S HOW YOU CAN PLAY BUBBLE BOBBLE TODAY

Bubble Bobble remains as popular today as it was almost 40 years ago. As a consequence, there are multiple ways to enjoy the Taito classic. Hyper Mega Tech!'s *Super Pocket Taito Edition* (far below) handheld frontlines *Bubble Bobble*, while Numskull offers a beautiful *Bubble Bobble* quarter size arcade cabinet. Fans can play both *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands* with the Nintendo Switch compilation Taito Milestones 3 or download the original from the Nintendo eShop. The original game comes bundled with the 2019 PlayStation 4/Switch game *Bubble Bobble 4 Friends*, and you can also stream the game on the retro streaming service Antstream Arcade (below). Basically, there's no excuse not to play *Bubble Bobble* – even in 2025.





» [Arcade] Collect all six EXTEND Bubbles, and the player gains an extra life and this colourful reward.

» [Arcade] Collecting bottles of Holy Water populates the current screen with bonus items.

always, one touch from an enemy and the player loses a life.

As the name suggests, the final boss, Super Drunk, is a superior version of the standard Drunk, but more on him in a bit. All enemies drop an item when vanquished, yielding a score bonus, and special bubbles float around some levels, housing either fire, fountains of water or lightning bolts. Jumping on these releases the element, killing any enemy in its path. Rumour has it there's a special bubble that bestows the lucky dragon with fireballs for bubbles, and Bub and Bob can jump on all bubbles, gaining access to otherwise unreachable areas.

Along with the enemies, *Bubble Bobble*'s platform structure is also deviously designed. Fortunately, the two dragons have some help. Magical items will appear throughout each stage, each granting either a score bonus or helpful abilities. Let's take the ability-based items first. The Red Shoe increases player speed [Doesn't take you back to Kansas? – Ed], and appears after Bub or Bob walks a certain distance, while Pink, Blue, and Yellow Candies extend bubble-blowing distance, increase bubble speed and the bubble firing rate, respectively.

There are also many environment and enemy-related items. The Clock freezes enemies, and Dynamite destroys all on-screen enemies. Parasols thrust the players forward a set handful of levels, depending on their colour, and appear after Bub and Bob pop a given number of Water Bubbles. Holy Water Bottles are another prize, turning the current screen into a bonus stage when collected, the monsters disappearing, and the level filling up with a colour-specific bonus item. For example, acquiring the yellow bottle populates the screen with rainbows, an apt foreshadowing of *Bubble Bobble*'s sequel. Rings give the player action-related points bonuses, while the Lamps wrap up collections of bonuses into short, one-stage power boosts. Perhaps the items players covet the most, however, are the Crosses, the blue Cross Of Water flooding the screen (fortunately, dragons can breathe underwater), the yellow Cross Of Thunder firing a massive lightning bolt, and the

» [Arcade] The final boss, Super Drunk, must be zapped with special Lightning Bubbles.

"THE FIRST DIFFICULT THING WAS TO GET SO MANY SPRITES ON THE SCREEN"
MIKE FOLLIN

CONVERSION CAPERS

C64

■ Quite simply, one of the C64's greatest arcade conversions and a playable marvel from Software Creations' Ste Ruddy and Andrew Threlfall. *Bubble Bobble* is also one of the best simultaneous two-player experiences on the computer, while the only downside is the twee and annoying music.

AMIGA

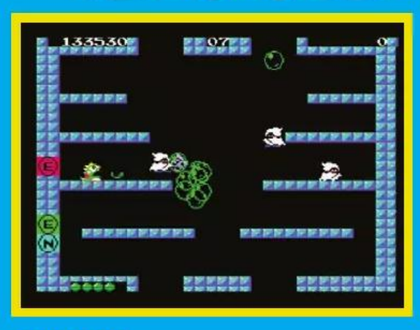
■ Another masterful home port of *Bubble Bobble* from Software Creations. The lovely music from David Whittaker is an Amiga-exclusive bonus, and the arcade game's sheer playability is perfectly recreated. Includes all levels and the EXTEND bubble bonus scheme. One of the Amiga's finest arcade conversions

AMSTRAD CPC

■ While lagging behind the C64 game in terms of visuals, this Amstrad port from Software Creations and Firebird is still an entertaining and smooth experience. Sadly, it lacks the speed of its fellow 8-bit games and is probably the weakest of its peers in terms of gameplay.

ATARI ST

■ Almost identical to the Commodore Amiga game, this is another highly impressive take on Taito's classic bubble-bursting arcade game. It loses a little sonically, but that's perhaps unfair considering the high quality of the Amiga audio. However, Atari ST owners could not complain about this fine arcade conversion.



MSX2

■ Another great home conversion of *Bubble Bobble*, which is maybe to be expected given it's developed by Taito itself. Released only in Japan and on cartridge, it's visually spot-on and plays brilliantly, too. Developer Clover released an unofficial MSX conversion three years later.

DEVELOPER Q&A

RETRO GAMER VENTURES INTO THE CAVE OF MONSTERS WITH MIKE FOLLIN OF SOFTWARE CREATIONS, AUTHOR OF THE EXCELLENT ZX SPECTRUM CONVERSION

Were you familiar with *Bubble Bobble*, and how did you come to work on the Spectrum game?
I hadn't seen it previously, despite spending a lot of time in the arcades! It was Software Creations' first multi-platform licence. I'd just done the Spectrum version of *The Sentinel* – and managed to not mess it up – so I was invited to go to work at its Manchester office.

With whom else did you work?
The 'Bubble' team had Ste Ruddy doing the C64 version and Andrew Threlfall doing the graphics. Dave Broadhurst joined us a while later to do the Atari ST and Amiga versions. Music was done out of house by someone Ste knew, and my brother Tim, of course.

Did you have an arcade machine to work from?
Yes, we had a machine in the office and spent many fun hours on it every day. That's how we learned all about the game, from playing it.

Was this your first arcade conversion?
It was my first 'official' arcade game. But in fact, I'd programmed several games at this point with various 'homages' to assorted arcade games. In some ways, it was more challenging to do an arcade game because everyone could compare it to the original. It didn't require the same kind of imaginative input, but it still allowed you to be creative in how you implemented the game.

Was *Bubble Bobble* a tricky project?
The first difficult thing was to get so many sprites on the screen. Then, late in development, we got some information from Taito, which had diagrams of how the bubbles were meant to move around for each of the 100 screens. That was too much memory at that point, so the only way to do it was to reduce the number of levels. Not many people got to level 80 anyway!

What did you think of your brother's work on *Bubble Bobble*'s audio?
Tim had previously worked on one-bit sound for the Spectrum – composing and coding in assembly language. *Bubble Bobble* was his first attempt at a chiptune. At first, he just copied the music exactly from the arcade game, thinking that was what was expected. It was then suggested that he did more with it, not altering the composition but making the notes sound more 'interesting'. Tim was more than up to that challenge and was soon developing music drivers with vibrato, tremolo, and full ADSR control.

What was it like getting a Crash Smash?
Getting a Crash Smash was always an honour – they knew what they were doing. That was my third one, but I'd also done three or four games that deservedly didn't get a Smash. I think *Bubble Bobble* stands up today because it was a reasonable conversion of a great game.

LIGHTNING BUBBLE

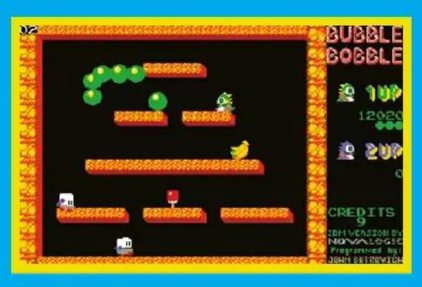
THE BEST HOME VERSIONS OF TAITO'S CLASSIC BUBBLE-BLOWING PLATFORMER

NES

Taito was on hand again to provide the NES home port. It's the most varied of the 8-bit versions, with some alternate level structure and a passcode system that enables players to jump straight back to the level their game ended on. Graphically, it struggles at times, but it's still a great two-player game.

APPLE II

Ugly, hard to play and utterly charmless, this Apple II interpretation is sadly rock bottom of all the home *Bubble Bobble*s. Of historical note, it was the first game developed by NovaLogic, which would go on to have much greater success with its range of PC flight sims.



PC

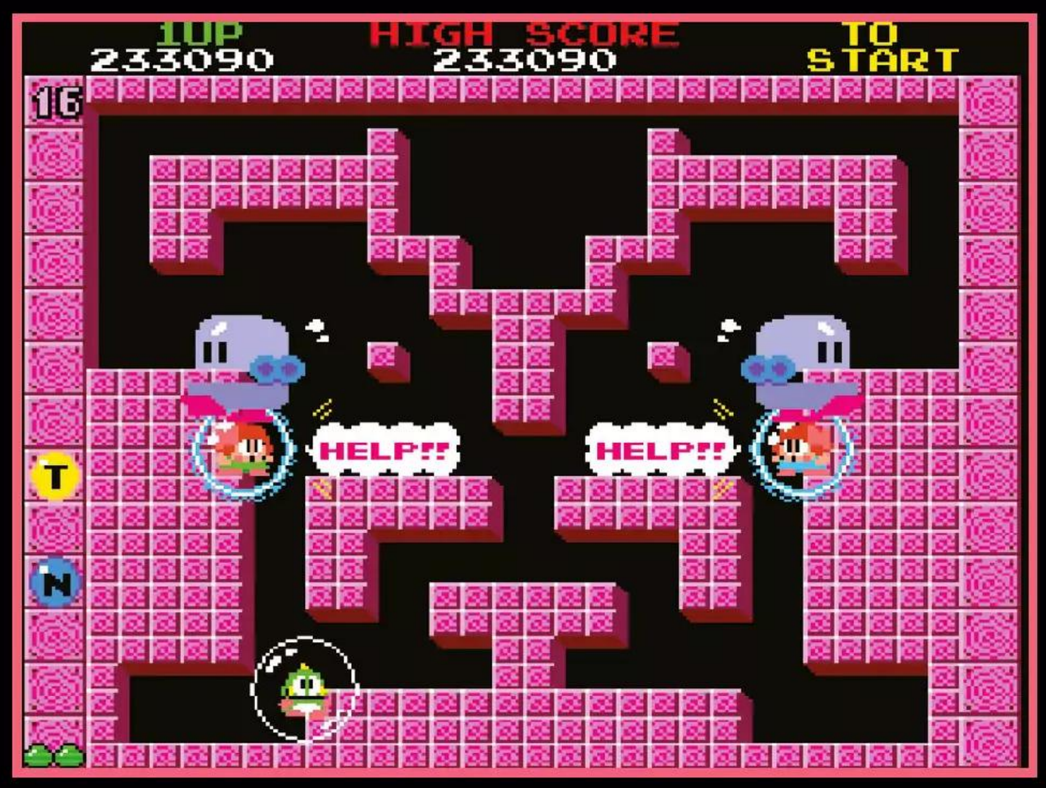
American developer and publisher NovaLogic did a much better job with its PC iteration of *Bubble Bobble*. The sprites and display are solid, and it even includes a high-score table. It's let down a touch with its shrill tune; otherwise, this is another slick and enjoyable game.

GAME GEAR

Despite its cramped screen display, the Game Gear version (complete with the slower gameplay of Master System *Bubble Bobble*) is a pure wonder, and it's one of the handheld's premier games full stop. Yes, there are sacrifices – but it's still a delight to play.

ZX SPECTRUM

Visually, the Spectrum game is miles behind its peers – poor Bub and Bob have become ghostlike figures – yet it nails the playability and feel of the arcade game. There are only 80 levels, however: even the supreme talents of programmer Mike Follin couldn't quite squeeze it all into 48K. 128K owners, however, got some lovely Tim Follin tunes.

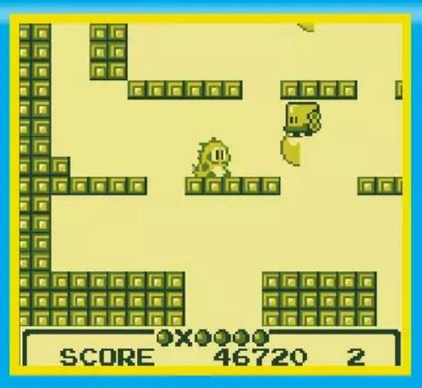


» [Arcade] Zen-Chans occasionally zoom by with the brothers' girlfriends in tow.

» [Arcade] Later levels house devious platform structures.

» [Arcade] In *Bubble Bobble*'s Good Ending, the brothers are reunited with their girlfriends.

"MAGICAL ITEMS WILL APPEAR THROUGHOUT EACH STAGE, EACH GRANTING EITHER A SCORE BONUS OR HELPFUL ABILITIES"



GAME BOY

■ Released in 1990, the first handheld version of *Bubble Bobble* is one-player only. It also adds a brand-new plot: Bob is ill, and only Super Drunk Jr's Moon Water can save him. While its scrolling can cause gameplay issues, it's another beautifully charming game from Taito.

GBA

■ Subtitled *Old & New*, the original version is included here alongside a 'new' game, which is essentially *Bubble Bobble* with fresh sprites, backgrounds and music. Both versions have the same scrolling issue of the earlier Game Boy games, slightly hampering the fundamental joy of *Bubble Bobble*.

SHARP X68000

■ This is an incredible release: not only does it contain a practically arcade-perfect port of *Bubble Bobble*, but there's also a new hidden game squirrelled away, too. A riff on Fukio Mitsuji's later game, *Syvalion*, *Sybubblun* is a small but horrendously difficult mix of the two games.

PLAYSTATION

■ Once you get past the corny intro sequences, this, as you'd expect over ten years later, is arcade-perfect. It has also been marginally aesthetically modernised and comes with the sequel, *Rainbow Islands*. It was also released on PC and Sega Saturn, which are identical to the PlayStation version.

MASTER SYSTEM

■ Known as *Final Bubble Bobble* in Japan, this Sega game expands upon the original but differently from the NES. It plays slower (including the oddly serene music) and now has 200 levels. Whether you consider that a bonus or not depends on how much you love *Bubble Bobble*...

red Cross Of Fire enabling the player's dragon to spit a limited amount of fireballs instead of bubbles. *Bubble Bobble* has many more effect items for the diminutive dragons to discover.

As with most arcade games, scoring is a key part of *Bubble Bobble*, and there are plenty of opportunities for the bubble-blowing duo to boost their tally. Each burst bubble accrues ten points while despatching a monster scores 1,000 points, in addition to its dropped bonus item. These range from lowly food items such as Oranges (400 points) and Bananas (500 points) to the higher-value Crowns, Jewels and Crystals, most of which appear upon the players meeting specific conditions such as completing the previous stage within a particular time. Players can also gain an extra life by collecting the EXTEND bubbles that drift around with the level's air current, and completing the sequence also incites an automatic jump to the next screen.

A world away from the sci-fi shoot-'em-ups and fighting games that dominated the arcades of the mid-Eighties, *Bubble Bobble* was a breath of fresh air. While superficially an uncomplicated game, the wealth of background criteria for some items and abilities endeared it to expert arcade gamers determined to discover the secrets of Taito's game. Perhaps the biggest of these is *Bubble Bobble*'s alternate endings. Complete the game as just a lone dragon gets you the so-called Bad Ending, with only Bub's girlfriend freed from her bubble prison. The Good Ending results from both dragons crossing the finishing line, while only the most skilled players can achieve the True Ending. Securing the Good Ending unlocks Super Mode – albeit after a predetermined series of joystick and button presses – and the subsequent True Ending, with both Bub and Bob's girlfriends and their parents freed from imprisonment. Playing in Super Mode also reveals a series of doors on the 20th, 30th and 40th levels, providing the players don't lose a life. These take the brothers to a secret room crammed with bonus items to collect.

While not totally original – Taito's own *Chack'n Pop*, an arcade game with many similarities, precedes it – *Bubble Bobble*'s broad appeal secured it great success in the mid-Eighties, a time of fierce competition in arcades. This success has led to an astonishingly enduring appeal, with sequels, spin-offs, and more appearing consistently until the present day. And who would have guessed that [SPOILER ALERT – Ed] those cute dragons were actually two humans named Bubby and Bobby? ✱

FOREVER BLOWING BUBBLES

RETRO GAMER LOOKS AT SOME OF BUBBLE BOBBLE'S MOST MEMORABLE SEQUELS AND SPIN-OFFS

RAINBOW ISLANDS: THE STORY OF BUBBLE BOBBLE 2

■ Taito quickly released its arcade follow-up to *Bubble Bobble* and resisted the temptation to follow a similar gameplay style. Now in human form, Bub (or Bob, as *Rainbow Islands* is an alternate two-player game) throws deadly rainbows as he rises up each level and attempts to defeat the nefarious Dark Shadow.

PARASOL STARS: THE STORY OF BUBBLE BOBBLE III

■ Planned for the PC Engine by Taito, *Parasol Stars* is officially a sequel to *Rainbow Islands*. Despite its subtitle and similarity, it's nominally separate from the original *Bubble Bobble* line as Bub and Bob are back in human form and armed with parasols. There's a tortuous tale to Ocean's C64 conversion – check out gamesthatwerent.com/gtw64/parasol-stars for the whole story.

PUZZLE BOBBLE

■ Known as *Bust-A-Move* outside of Japan, *Puzzle Bobble* is a bubble-matching game with little in common with *Bubble Bobble* aside from its characters and candy-cute look. Players take control of Bub and Bob in dragon form, competing against each other or solo to clear the play area of coloured bubbles.

BUBBLE SYMPHONY

■ Taito gave us a third *Bubble Bobble* sequel in 1994, taking the base gameplay of its original hit and expanding it into a colourful explosion of bubble-blowing fun. Now with new playable characters, enemies and branching levels, the riot of colour can make play a bit messy at times – but it's still an enormously enticing arcade game.

Hardware Heaven

XE Games System

» **MANUFACTURER:** Atari » **YEAR:** 1987
» **COST:** £119.99 (launch, deluxe set), £200+ (today, boxed), £150+ (today, unboxed)

Though Atari's 8-bit computer line was approaching its eighth anniversary in 1987, the company was still committed to pushing those products. The problem, as Atari's Neil Harris told comp.sys.atari.8bit users, was that mass-market stores were "retreating from the computer business" and "doing a fabulous business in game systems like Nintendo, Sega, and, of course, Atari". Without machines in stores, software developers were reluctant to support Atari's machine. The XE Games System (XEGS), like the Atari 5200, would offer the 8-bit computer technology in a console form factor. Unlike the 5200, it would be cross-compatible.

The XEGS is an attractively designed device that certainly had a decent amount of grunt, essentially being a redesigned Atari 65XE with a detachable keyboard. Though its internals were somewhat dated, it was able to instantly offer a huge library with plenty of great games. Unfortunately, Atari was spread rather thin at the time as it was also supporting the 2600 and 7800 consoles, and with stronger competition in both the console and computer markets the system quickly faded into the background. ✱

ESSENTIAL GAME

Dropzone

It's rare for us to recommend an essential game that's older than the hardware it runs on, but *Dropzone* is worth it. The late, great Archer Maclean's shoot-'em-up is a fantastic game that was tailor-made for Atari computers, and still impresses with its high-speed and frantic action. If it weren't for the fact that you'll need to add a cassette or disk drive to your XEGS to actually play it, it would feel very much like a console game – and we mean that in the most complimentary way possible.

XE Games System fact

■ The basic set retailed for £79.99 and only included the console, joystick and built-in *Missile Command* game. The £119.99 deluxe set added the games *Flight Simulator II* and *Bug Hunt*, plus a keyboard and lightgun.

PROCESSOR: 8-BIT 6502-BASED SALLY CPU (1.79MHZ),

MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE (CASSETTE AND FLOPPY DISK OPTIONAL)

GRAPHICS: ATARI ANTIC AND GTIA

AUDIO: ATARI POKEY

MEMORY: 64KB RAM

A TRIBUTE TO

COMPUTER GRAPHICS LTD

AFTER RELEASING BEDROOM CODERS' GAMES AS THOR, A REBRAND SAW ODIN IMPRESSING WITH IN-HOUSE HITS LIKE NODES OF YESOD, ROBIN OF THE WOOD AND HEARTLAND. FORMER ODIN CREATIVES STUART FOTHERINGHAM AND KEITH TINMAN REVIEW THE CELEBRATED STUDIO

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

STUART FOTHERINGHAM

Former artist/designer Stuart Fotheringham worked for Software Projects, Odin and finally Denton Designs. He's now CEO of a financial advisory firm he cofounded.

The company that became Odin was set up in 1984 as Thor Computer Software, with its remit being to publish games created by bedroom coders. Thor's early successes included Chris Kerry's platformer trilogy: *Jack And The Beanstalk*, *Giant's Revenge* and *The House Jack Built*. Its final release was the equally impressive collect-'em-up *Stairways*, which was the work of developers who became founding members of Thor's second incarnation.

Founded to tap into an industry shift from freelance developers to in-house studio teams, Odin immediately became a force to reckon with thanks to its 1985 debut, the sci-fi arcade adventure *Nodes Of Yesod*. Hot on its heels came *Robin Of The Wood*, a vast adventure with character interaction and a beat-'em-up element, and *The Arc Of Yesod*, a *Nodes* sequel released on a revived Thor label.

The following year saw Odin enter an ambitious deal with Telecomsoft, the fruits of which included the well-received shooter *Mission AD* and the epic romp *Heartland*.

The studio's 1987 highlights were the run-and-gun *On The Tiles* and the side-scrolling blaster *Sidewize*, which was followed by *Crosswize* in 1988. Sadly, by the time this and Odin's 1988 Guy Fawkes platformer *The Plot* came out, the pressure of its Telecomsoft contract had led to it losing its creatives and closing its doors.

Many years later, in 2010, a reincarnated Odin released enhanced iOS and Flash versions of *Nodes Of Yesod*. Now only time can tell if the respected firm will revisit more of its hits in the future. *

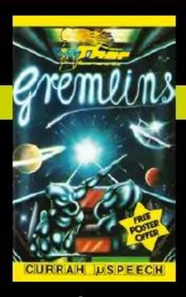
KEITH TINMAN

Musician Keith Tinman created tunes for Thor, Odin, Ocean and several other publishers. He currently provides sound design for film and TV – see keithtinman.com

Mission AD and Scary Monsters cover art images courtesy of Lemon64.

GREMLINS

ZX SPECTRUM • 1984



■ An early effort by Thor stalwart Chris Kerry, *Gremlins* is a *Galaxians* tribute with a novel twist. Every stage features a different type of alien to shoot down, and there are three phases to each stage. To begin with, your opponents attack your ship against a pitch-black night sky, which makes their brightly coloured forms easy to pick out. However the next phase introduces coloured bands across the sky that the cunning aliens use as cover for their assaults. Finally, there's a third phase where the rainbow-like sky flashes different hues, leading to Jeff Minter levels of visual overload. If you manage to survive these three phases then it's onto a fresh level of faster opponents.

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1984

■ The huge colourful environmental features in *Jack And The Beanstalk* sit in sharp contrast to the meagre background visuals typically found in early Spectrum platformers. The Thor platformer also stands out for its demanding gameplay, which is defined by pixel-perfect navigation. Each level requires you to collect an item and then head to an exit while avoiding deadly creatures, which sounds straightforward. The catch is that any climbing you do has to follow a precise path. If you deviate from this by even a few pixels then you fall to your death and have to start the level from scratch. So it's a strict memory test, but one that you get great satisfaction from mastering.

GIANT'S REVENGE

ZX SPECTRUM, C64 • 1984

■ Very much a continuation of *Jack And The Beanstalk*, although *Giant's Revenge* boasts seven levels to its predecessor's four. The brightly coloured sequel also manages to up the ante in terms of its difficulty. With some of its stages, dogged opponents are all that stand in the way of you progressing horizontally, whereas vertical movement requires you to follow a specific route perfectly. In other levels, however, moving left or right across the screen takes every bit as much care as ascending upwards, since this is only possible to do without dying if you stick to a pre-defined but unclear path. This certainly makes things challenging to begin with, but once you work out where you can and can't go on each level then you can make short work of them.

FAIRYTALE FUN

WHY YOU SHOULD PLAY THE COLOURFUL PLATFORMER

PRECISION PLATFORMING

■ It's not always obvious how far along something you should be standing before you jump a gap; it all comes down to trial and error.

COOL CHALLENGES

■ As well as exploring caves and leaping over underground lakes, you have to sneak into the giant's house and steal his Elixir Of Life.

EPIC ENEMIES

■ Unlike the first game, which has creepy crawly opponents, *Giant's Revenge* has a set of supernatural foes such as dragons and demons.

SUPERB STAGES

■ Each level in *Giant's Revenge* is absolutely unique; some involve platforming while others focus on climbing or navigation challenges.

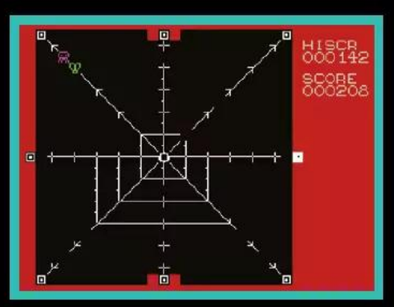
RELENTLESS RESETS

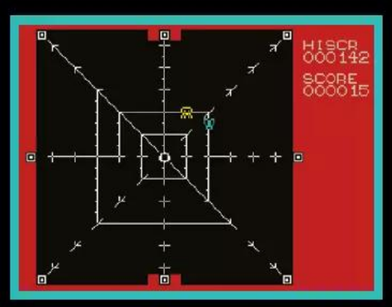
■ Don't expect an easy ride. Leaving defined paths and colliding with enemies costs lives and sends you back to the start of the level.

TWILIGHT ZONE

ZX SPECTRUM • 1984

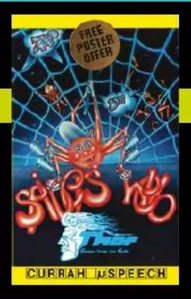
It would be fair to describe *Twilight Zone* as a tribute to Jeff Minter's VIC-20 shooter *Laser Zone*, but it would be doing the Spectrum title an injustice to call it a rip-off. That said, the two releases do have a lot in common. With both games, you control a cannon that moves left and right across the bottom of the screen while at the same time managing a second cannon that moves up and down the right-hand side of the screen. So far, so similar, but *Twilight Zone* differentiates itself in two main respects. Most obviously, its cannons shoot missiles a shorter or longer distance depending on how long or how briefly you refrain from hitting the fire button between shots. Of equal note is that the game's opponents bounce around rather than following straight trajectories like those in *Laser Zone*.



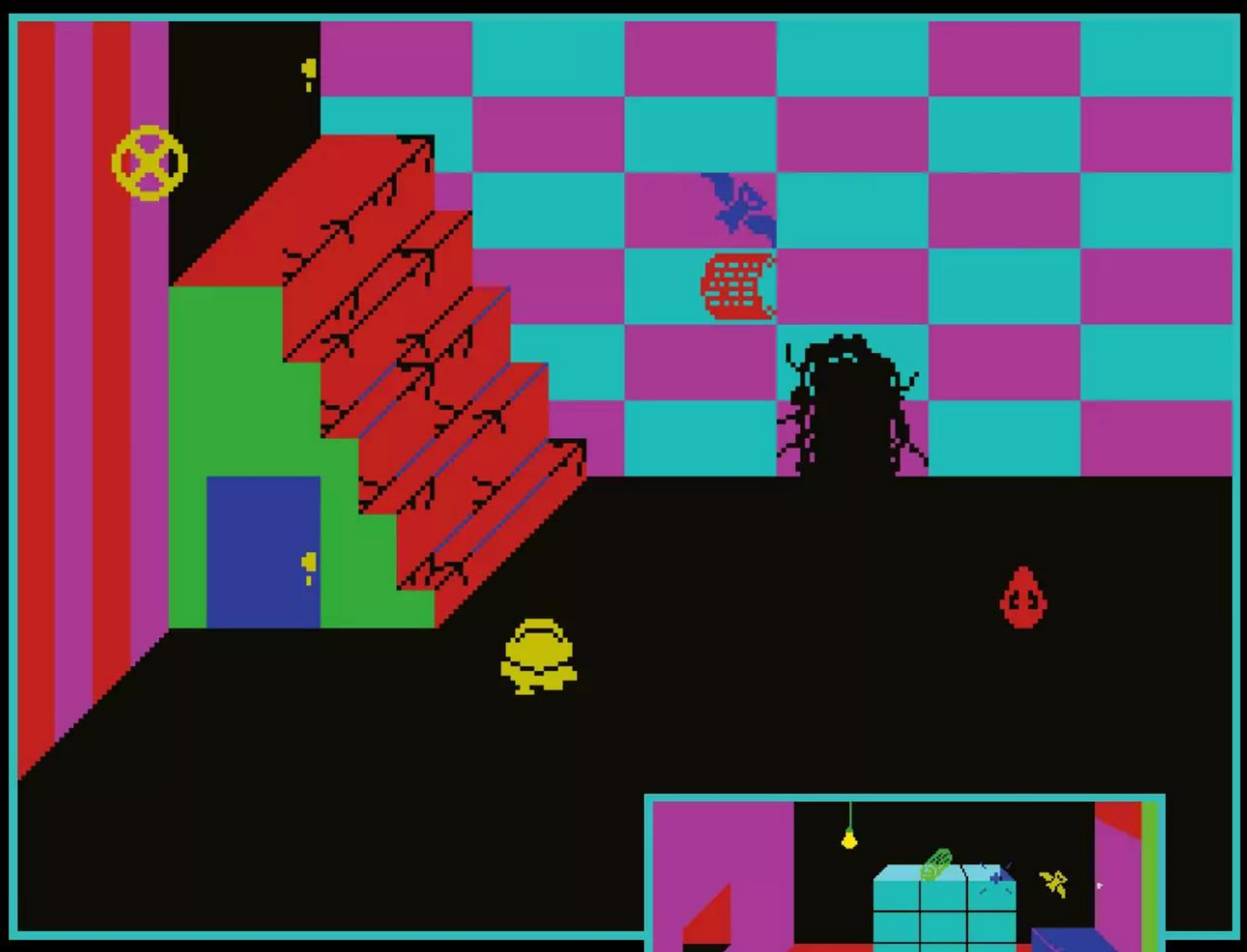


SPIDERS WEB

ZX SPECTRUM • 1984

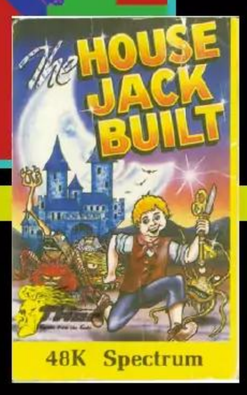


The hugely original *Spiders Web* features a spider looking to catch some flies. These fall helplessly from the top of the screen, and providing you've spun a web to catch their fall then you just have to take them to one of eight lairs. Once these are all full you proceed to the next stage. Despite this simple premise, there's far more to consider. Spinning webs takes time, and while you're doing so flies drop safely off the screen. If one lands on you then you lose a life. When you take too long to get to a trapped fly it struggles free and wreaks the section of web it was stuck to. Worse still, if you're on that web section when the fly escapes you fall to your death.



THE HOUSE JACK BUILT

ZX SPECTRUM, C64 • 1984



Unlike the earlier *Jack* games, there aren't pre-set paths in *The House Jack Built* and climbing doesn't require absolute precision. Where it resembles its predecessors is with its objective of collecting an item from each level while avoiding deadly opponents.

KEITH'S MEMORIES

I wrote the track for *The House Jack Built* in my mum and dad's spare room in Liverpool, I wanted a catchy 'jolly' piece of music to give it a light-hearted feeling. This was my first adventure in assembler code, and I had to type all the decimal notes into a music driver to create the separate tracks, so '25' was middle C and so on. There had to be an exact amount of notes and rests in each track or it would go out of time very quickly."

HOUSEKEEPING HINTS

HOW TO TACKLE THE TRICKY COLLECT-'EM-UP

OVERALL OBJECTIVE

Instead of having a small number of super-hard stages that you play in sequence, *The House Jack Built* has numerous manageable levels that you can go to and from.

EPIC EXPLORATION

There's a menagerie of surreal opponents that you face in *The House Jack Built*, from geometric shapes to elephant-headed curiosities.

LIVELY LOCATIONS

As well as visiting a dungeon and exploring an attic, you have to negotiate a maze and visit the moon by climbing a ladder that sits on the roof of Jack's house!

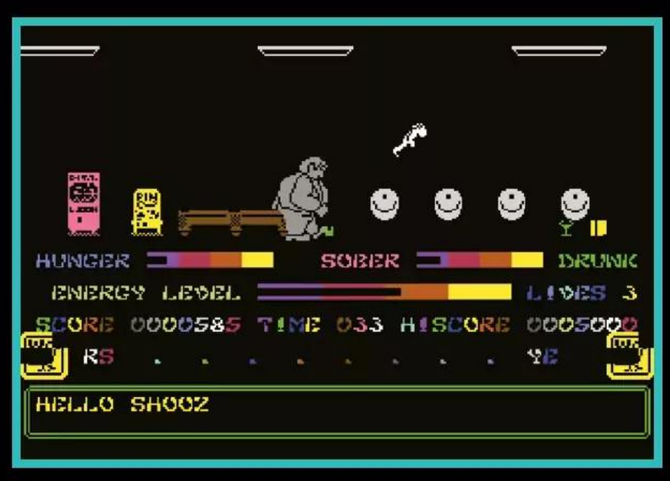
TREASURE HUNT

There's no reason given for collecting the objects in *The House Jack Built*, but for some reason it's essential you find the likes of a crucifix and a flick knife!

STAIRWAYS

C64 • 1985

For obvious reasons, the fact that *Stairways* was inspired by the wild nights out of *Manic Miner* creator Matthew Smith isn't mentioned on the game's cassette inlay. However its origins were revealed by one of the game's authors, and this makes sense of what would otherwise be an odd set of objectives. Your goal is to assemble pieces of a gold amulet that are scattered around a nightclub – all while drunk, but of course there are obstacles in your way. *Manic Miner*-esque boots are thrown at you and have to be deflected with thought bubbles, but projecting too many of these sobers you up, which results in you being unable to project more of them. Thankfully there's a well-stocked bar you can visit, so you can address that problem. However, getting hit by too many boots brings you close to unconsciousness, and that requires an energy-boosting trip to the club's burger bar. While doing all of this you have to avoid kicking over empty glasses left lying on the floor, as doing so literally gets you kicked out by the bouncer.



CLUB CATASTROPHE

SURVIVING A NIGHTMARE NIGHT OUT IN STAIRWAYS

AMULET ASSEMBLY

As with *Sabre Wulf*, *Stairways* tasks you with assembling an amulet, but this one belongs to the great budgie Wonga!

BOOTS & BUBBLES

Remember the boot in *Manic Miner*? Well *Stairways* has you deflecting flying versions by projecting thought bubbles.

HAPPY HOUR

In the nightclub-set *Stairways* you aim to stay drunk. Why? Because you run out of thought bubbles if you sober up.

FOOD RUN

Getting bashed by boots drains your energy, but thankfully the *Stairways* nightclub sells energy-restoring burgers.

BOUNCER BLUES

Abandoned glasses litter the floors in *Stairways*. Don't knock any over or the doorman will kick you out the door!

NODES OF YESOD

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1985

As well as slick animation and challenging platforming, *Nodes* features a drone-like mole that dispatches enemies and reveals hidden areas. Your main player character ricochets or gets time-outs after colliding with most foes, but contact with his archenemy costs him collectables.

STUART'S MEMORIES

Because the *Nodes Of Yesod* cover was of Buzz Aldrin, people thought the hero was wearing a proper spacesuit. He was supposed to be wearing a blazer, slacks, a cravat and shoes – with a space helmet on top. We were originally going for a more comedic feel, which was why we originally called it *Moon Munching Moles From Mars*! But then a local artist did the cover, and it was much more serious. So we changed the name to *Nodes Of Yesod* and made quite a few more changes to make it more serious. If you bought it on the C64 you got two versions: the original and a faster remix. Because the C64 had hardware sprites its version ran significantly faster than the Spectrum version, so we slowed it down, but the remix ran much faster without the slowed down code."

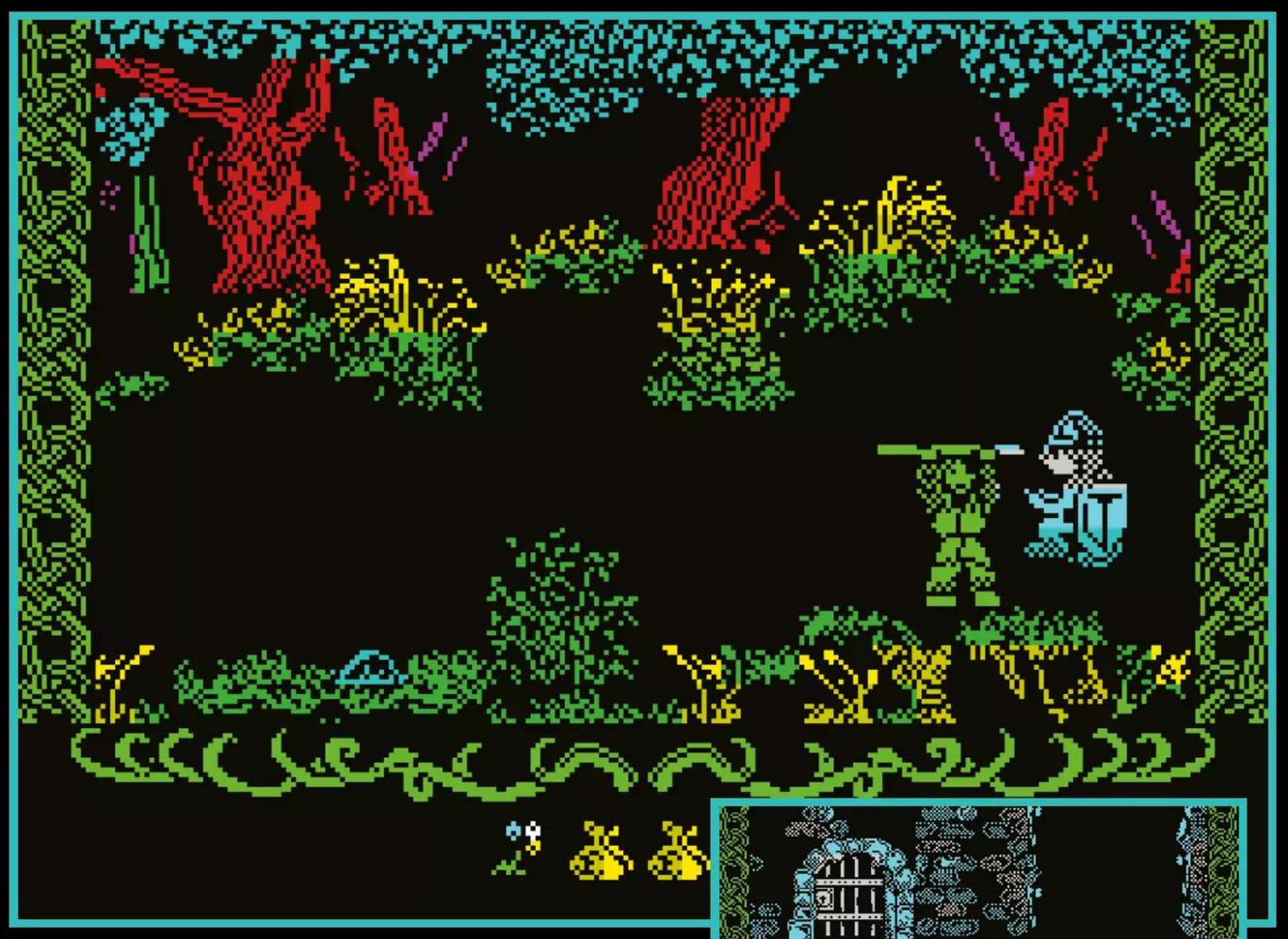
THE ARC OF YESOD

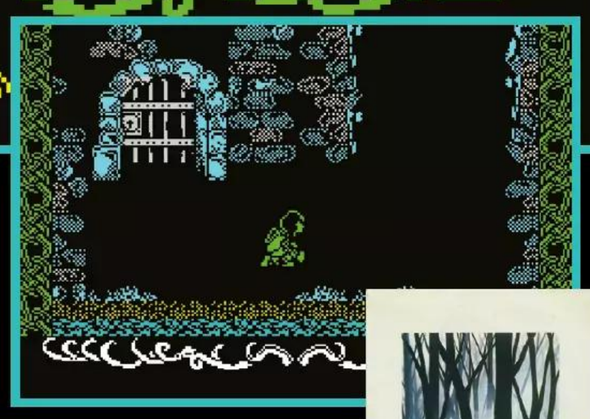
ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1985

Although superficially similar to *Nodes*, *Arc Of Yesod* differs in a number of areas. Rather than a trained mole you get a remotely controlled droid, and instead of it having to get close to foes to bash them to oblivion it can blast them with a laser from afar. *Arc* also features smart bombs that destroy most enemies and paralyse the ones that steal your crystals. You get one of these each time you collect an extra life. Last but not least, *Arc* introduces opponents that reverse your controls.

STUART'S MEMORIES

One of the guys working under Steve Wetherill on *Nodes* became the lead coder on *Arc Of Yesod*. Effectively he had to get the *Nodes* code working with our new graphics and maps, and then Steve came in and did the '*Defender*' laser, and a few other things. We decided that since it was pretty much the same as *Nodes* we couldn't charge full-price for it, so Paul McKenna re-launched the Thor label. *Arc* didn't take us very long to do. *Nodes* probably took six months, whereas *Arc* took us more like six weeks."





ROBIN OF THE WOOD

C64, VARIOUS • 1985

Although exploration and collection are a big part of *Robin Of The Wood*, there are also soldiers that you take down with a staff, an evil bishop who you can separate from his riches and mystical characters for you to barter with.

STUART'S MEMORIES

"We were obsessed with *Robin Of Sherwood*, which was on TV at the time. We actually did some screenshots that were in *Crash*, and the show's lawyers got in touch to say that we weren't allowed to copy the show, and that it had to be distinct. We liked the Sheriff Of Nottingham, and we were interested in the pagan stuff. That was why we originally had the Spirit Of The Forest and a big stag who talked to you. But I think because of memory limitations that might have been replaced with the witch."

MEMORABLE MECHANICS

A LOOK AT THE ACE ADVENTURE'S GAMEPLAY

ENDLESS EXPLORATION

The vast, sprawling depiction of Sherwood Forest in *Robin Of The Wood* is a map maker's dream with distinct areas that act as way-markers.

VARIED VILLAINS

Soldiers with crossbows patrol Sherwood Forest and protect the crooked Bishop Of Peterborough; there are also wild boars that roam freely.

FUND RAISER

Taxes on the poor pay for the Bishop's military escort, but it can be dispatched and the money reclaimed with the help of a long staff.

ASSORTED ALLIES

A hermit heals your wounds, and you can trade gold for weapons with an ancient forest Ent and wildflowers for teleportation with a witch.

OBJECT LESSON

Aside from gold and wildflowers, there are also quivers of arrows to be sought out once you've bartered with the ancient Ent to get a bow.

COOL COMBAT

While Robin's trusty staff is a far better option when it comes to melee combat, his bow and arrows make for an invaluable ranged weapon.

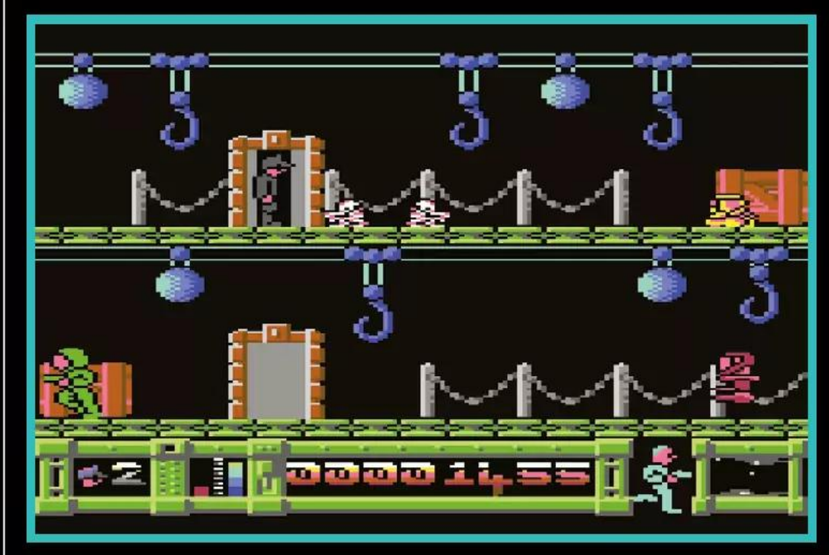
ICUPS

C64, ZX SPECTRUM • 1986

ICUPS tests you with a vertically scrolling shooter before dropping you into an enemy starship where as well as blasting foes you also have to locate bomb parts to destroy their craft. Opponents in the first section hardly rain down ammo, but they do fire in four directions. You can destroy them by ramming them into the sidewalls as well as shooting them. The bomb components in the second section are in protective domes that have to be shot to pieces, and adding to your challenge is the fact that your jetpack is affected by gravity, making it tricky to control.

KEITH'S MEMORIES

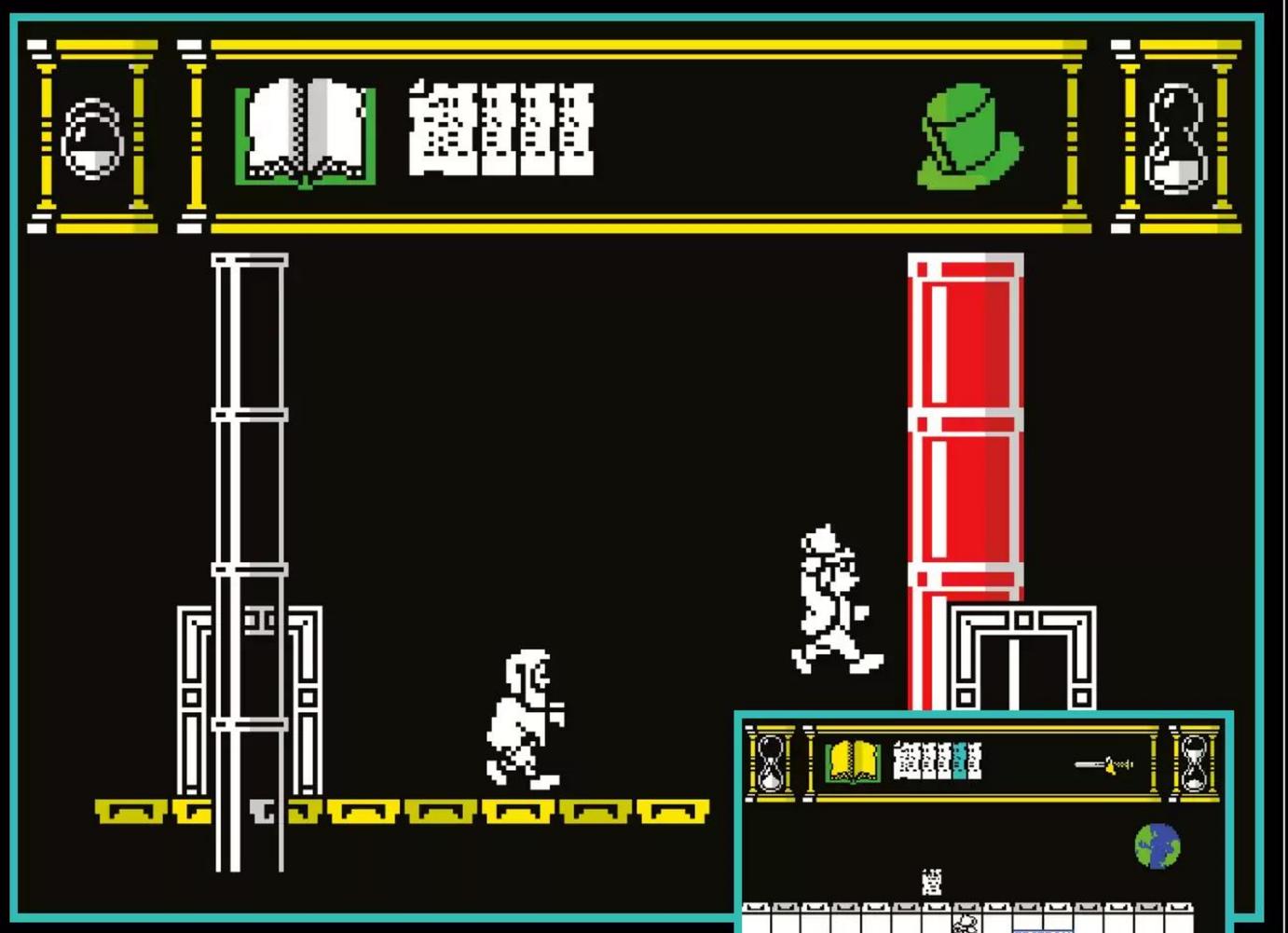
I wrote the Spectrum *ICUPS* music by looking at the game in development; I got inspired by the character of the game. I thought it needed an upbeat catchy tune to make people notice it, so I sat at my synth keyboard and played different ideas for a theme, and the *ICUPS* tune just popped into my head, and fingers!"

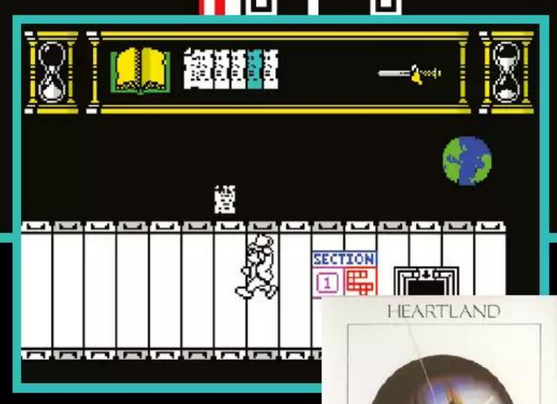


MISSION AD

C64 • 1986

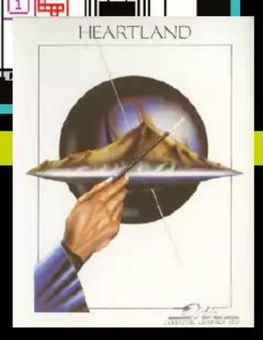
At their best, run-and-guns can be joyful experiences filled with wanton destruction, and *Mission AD* matches this description. It's played at speed; everything from the player character to his assassin targets to the droids and civilians that get in the way move at pace. Even the lifts that allow you to hop from stacked level to stacked level are quick as a flash. There are no moral restrictions either; you have a license to kill, and anyone who gets in your way is collateral damage. To begin with, you have eight assassins to track down and terminate per mission, and to aid you with this there's an on-screen mini-map showing their locations. The action takes place in a bunker with eight distinct-looking sectors, each of which has multiple floors. Travelling between floors is achieved by using the aforementioned elevators, whereas moving between sectors requires a transporter.





HEARTLAND

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1986



Heartland is defined by its layered levels and the exploration those entail. Your top hat is your base weapon, but you can get more powerful armaments by collecting spells. Your goal is to destroy black book pages and collect white ones.

STUART'S MEMORIES

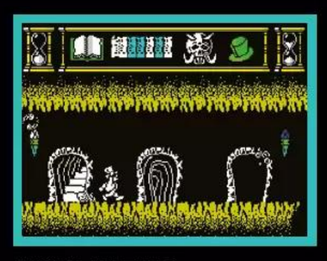
"Colin had an idea for a game he called *Kimera*. It was chimera, but spelled with a 'k' instead of 'ch', which is an animal that's got all different parts. He just liked the word. Then the reason it got called *Heartland* in the end was because we were big fans of the goth band The Sisters Of Mercy, who had a record called *Heartland*. The innovation in *Heartland* was going into and out of the screen, and you could rotate the character so you could see his back or his front, and then go in or out. The weapon upgrades came from *Ghosts 'N Goblins*. The idea with the weapons was that there was an icon for each weapon you were using, like the big fireball that you fired."

EPIC EXPERIENCE

WHY HEARTLAND IS SO MAGICAL

ECLECTIC ENVIRONMENTS

By 8-bit computer standards, *Heartland* is a thing of beauty. The game's locations are highly eclectic, taking in everything from medieaval villages to space stations.

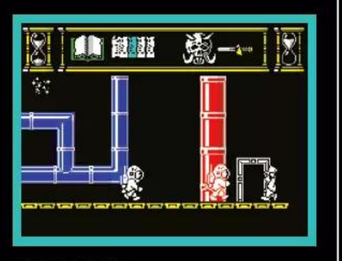


NONLINEAR NAVIGATION

As well as travelling left and right through single-screen settings, you go into and out of them, which gives you something of a challenge when you try to map them.

INTRIGUING ITEMS

Magic fireballs and knives are more powerful projectile weapons that are gained by catching floating spells. There are also white book pages to seek out and secure.



DIVERSE ADVERSARIES

Bewitched villagers and lumberjacks, wizards, medieaval knights and evil spacemen are just some of the foes who frustrate your quest to free *Heartland* from tyranny.

HYPABALL

C64, ZX SPECTRUM • 1986

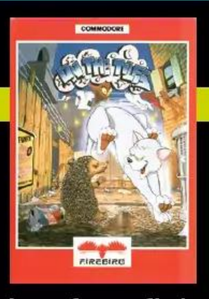
Best described as low-gravity basketball, *HypaBall* elevates that concept by limiting the time each player can keep the ball to two-and-a-half seconds, and by having a basket that constantly moves. One of each team's players stays on the ground to throw the ball back into play, while the other players fly around after the ball and each other.

KEITH'S MEMORIES

The music for *HypaBall* was written late at night in an office in Liverpool city centre, I was experimenting with a digital delay guitar pedal by putting the C64 output through it. I started to get an idea after hearing the notes cascading away and a rhythm came out of doing that, then I just kept adding on to it. It sounded great to me, but then I turned the digital delay pedal off and lots of its atmosphere was lost, but it still sounded great!"

ON THE TILES

C64 • 1987



One of the few, if not the only, animal themed run-and-guns, *On The Tiles* challenges you to patrol the streets at night as a humble moggy. Levels are cleared by collecting four fish bones, but an army of natural enemies stands in your way. Hawks, hedgehogs and frogs drain your energy if they make contact with you, but you can fend them off by spitting at them. Lost energy can be replenished by catching mice and sparrows, but there's nothing that can be done about fleas that jump from your foes to you. If you get ten of these or your energy drains entirely you lose a life.

KEITH'S MEMORIES

"I felt that the cat in *On The Tiles* needed an almost 'jazzy' feel to it, so I tried to create that feel with the music I created. I started with the walking bass line, and then added chord stabs and a melody. I think it only took me 30 minutes to do from start to finish."

UFO

C64 • 1987

Released as a budget title, *UFO* brings to mind *Galaxians*, although it has many more features than the single-screen shooters of the Seventies. You have limited Power Shields that you can activate, with occasional recharges that are delivered via parachute drops that have to be collected. There's also an energy bar instead of one-hit deaths. Your lasers overheat if you just mindlessly mash the fire button, and there's an upgrade facility that you can only get to by first steering your ship safely along a lengthy and meandering route. There's even a *Defender*-style mini-radar highlighting the targets that you have to destroy to complete the current level.

KEITH'S MEMORIES

I have no idea about the gameplay that was designed for *UFO*, but I had a free hand in creating the music for it so I just tried to write a catchy tune. The idea was simply to make players hum it to themselves while they were playing the game."

SIDEWIZE

ZX SPECTRUM, C64 • 1987

Rather than four progressively harder levels, this side-scrolling shooter has four equally tough, differently themed stages that can be tackled in any order. The formations of foes get more daunting and power-ups released get more effective as you progress through each one. Once you complete these there's a final challenge to face.

KEITH'S MEMORIES

The Speccy version of *Sidewize* didn't have much music to be honest, but the C64 version had a title track. I wrote this on a C64 app called Electro Sound. The music was written after I got inspiration from the gameplay. Electro Sound gave me a new easy way to create music and new sounds, the old music driver prior to using Electro Sound was a bit of a programming mission, having to create layers of hand-typed data with plenty of room for errors. So it was just easier and quicker to create a track for the C64 with Electro Sound."

PLENTIFUL PICK-UPS

A RUNDOWN OF THE INTENSE SHOOTER'S POWER-UPS

BEST LIFE

You get four lives and lose some, so look out for power-ups that look like crash helmets. These are the extra lives.

ARMAMENTS

Your pump action pulse rifle can be exchanged for a laser, an anti-matter gun or a three-way scatter shot.

ULTIMATE UPGRADES

No matter which gun you happen to have, collecting plus-sign icons will upgrade them by six levels.

FAST FORWARD

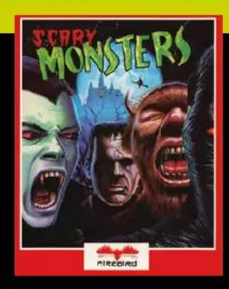
Collecting the power-ups that look like fast-forward icons will increase your speed. You can boost this up to six times.

HUMAN SHIELD

The force fields in *Sidewize* are plasma balls that move around you, destroying anything that they come into contact with.

SCARY MONSTERS

C64 • 1988



Some interesting mechanics enhance the intense run-and-gun action at the heart of *Scary Monsters*. Its levels take place in mansions scattered around an island, which you find by exploring an overhead map. As well as countless minions, the mansions are home to six bosses and six special weapons to dispatch them with, but you don't know which mansions the bosses and weapons are in.

KEITH'S MEMORIES

The music for *Scary Monsters* was conceived in my head while I was looking at the screen art. I just started humming it, and away I went and created it using Electro Sound. I wasn't aware that some of the gameplay in *Scary Monsters* was criticised in reviews to be honest, but I would love to read any reviews of my sonic efforts! It was a different time in game music back then and we didn't have the luxury of using pre-made music tracks that streamed from DVDs etc. Having to use a gaming device's sound chip to create something that was acceptable for the time was a great challenge, and to get a 9/10 for music or sound was a great thrill."

THE PLOT

ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC • 1988

■ It's a shame *The Plot* didn't come out in late-1986 as intended, as it likely would have garnered as much critical acclaim as Odin's earlier arcade adventures. Instead, the game's huge map, testing platforming, weapon mechanics and collection-based tasks were deemed old-fashioned when it finally came out in 1988. Your goal is to collect a set amount of dynamite plus a special firework to light it. There are also lesser fireworks with unique properties, and these plus spare dynamite sticks can be used to dispatch enemies, but they're limited, so they should be used with care.

KEITH'S MEMORIES

I'm not sure where the Guy Fawkes game idea for *The Plot* came from or the reason for creating it, but the music I made for it was just a track that I had created for another project, and I simply used it for *The Plot* instead. I really can't remember the other project, I think it was just on storyboards when I wrote it and never actually made it to the full design stage."

CROSSWIZE

ZX SPECTRUM • 1988

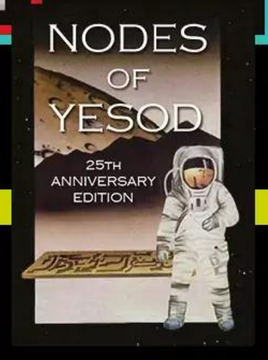
■ What with it being the sequel to *Sidewize*, it stands to reason that *Crosswize* puts you in a spacesuit, arms you with a laser gun and straps a jetpack to your back – just like its predecessor. Where it differs is with its environments and mechanics. Rather than exotic planets, you fly over rows of buildings, from cottages and town houses to industrial plants. You can face right as well as left while blasting, unlike *Sidewize*, although the sequel's better weapons have finite energy. There are multiple collectables as before, but new options are available such as smart bombs, temporary invulnerability and two scatter shots, all of which have two power levels.

STUART'S MEMORIES

"Steve and Colin's last Spectrum games at Odin were *Sidewize* and *Crosswize*, and I quite liked those, because everyone said it was impossible to get per-pixel scrolling on a Spectrum, but Steve managed to do it using some timing hack with the chip to give you smooth scrolling. So they did those, and *Crosswize* was originally going to be an Odin game."

NODES OF YESOD

IOS, VARIOUS • 2010



■ As well as making it possible to play the original game on the go, the *Nodes 25th Anniversary Edition* boasts an Enhanced mode with various new features, multi-colour higher-resolution graphics and CD-quality music. It additionally allows you to tip toe around, which makes pixel-perfect platforming easier. The enhanced mode includes a map and on-screen hints you can call up while playing. It also has fresh mechanics relating to the original's Moon Worms, which now guard Moon Gloves that are required to collect Alchiems. You claim these gloves after defeating the worms with a Moon Gun, which of course you have to find. There's also an *Apple TV 30th Anniversary Edition*. Both anniversary editions have a save state system.

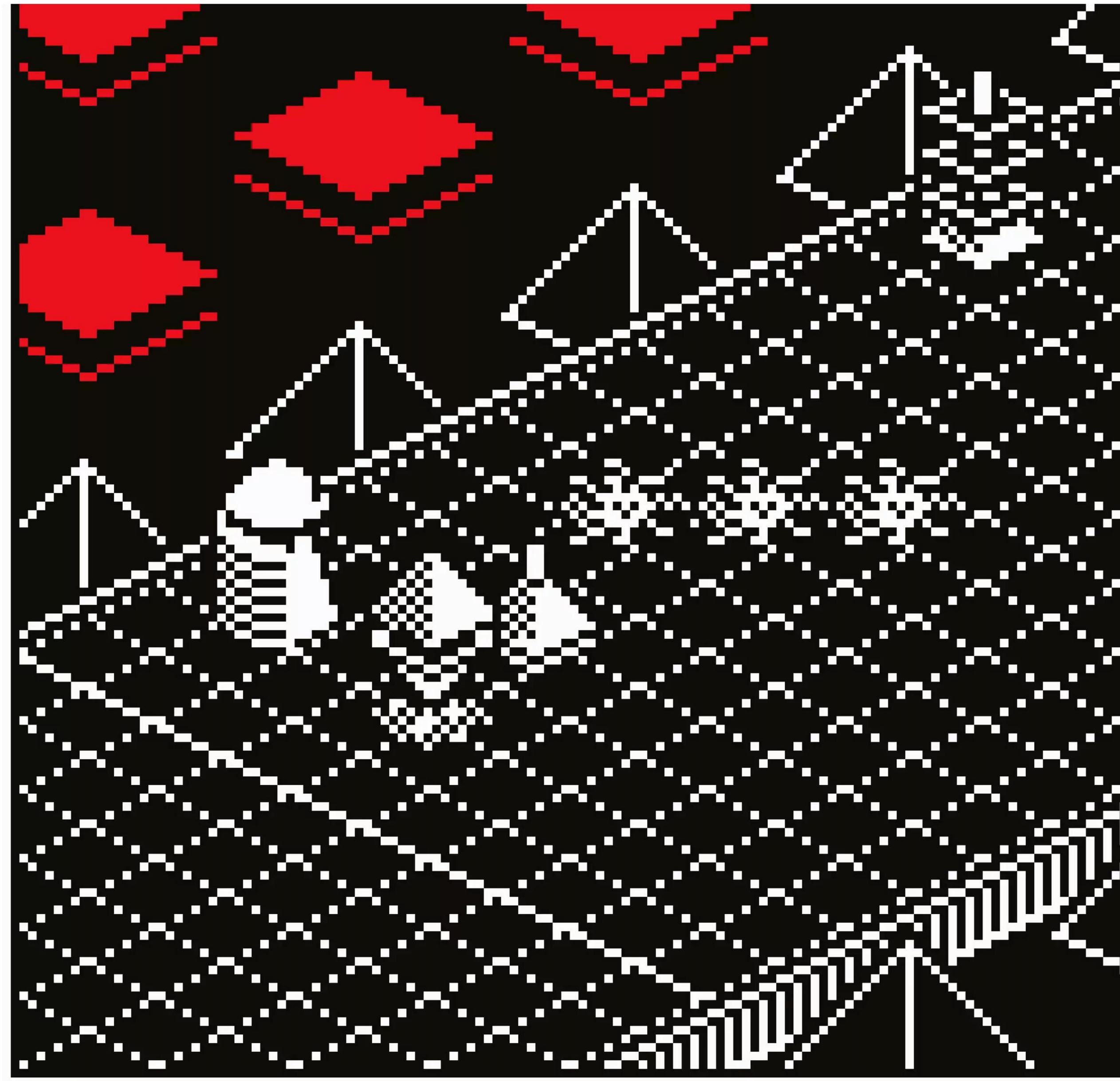
STUART'S MEMORIES

Steve did some new versions of *Nodes* on mobile, and for the Apple TV as well. He changed the game slightly, he might have also put weapons in, actually, and slightly bigger worms. That was something we took from *Bandersnatch* for the original *Nodes* – the green worms. There was a great big one in *Bandersnatch*. We didn't do anything as big in the original *Nodes*, and that was perhaps why they looked like sleeping bags!"

UNRELEASED ODIN

THE ODIN GAMES THAT WERE NEVER PUBLISHED

■ Odin's demise following an ambitious multi-game deal with Telecomsoft meant that some of its projects weren't completed, never mind published. Of the titles that are known about, there's *PLOD* – a side-scrolling shooter that 8-bit legend Joffa Smith contributed graphics to, and a promising tank game with the stunningly original working title *Tank Game*. Two other works in progress were *Lusitania*, a ship wreak-based collect-'em-up, and *Spartacus* (shown here), where you took the role of the ancient gladiator in a brutal beat-'em-up. Screenshots of these last two titles were teased in *Amstrad Action*, but like the others they were sadly never released.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Alien Highway: Encounter 2

CLOSE, BUT NO CIGAR

» **AMSTRAD CPC** » **1986**
» **VORTEX SOFTWARE**

When I went to Venice in 2024 I had the same meal every evening – a pepperoni pizza for my main and tiramisu for my dessert, washed down with a cold beer. Generally, I'm not a fan of trying brand-new things and if there's a choice between something I haven't eaten before and might not enjoy, versus something I have eaten before and liked I'll always go for that first option.

I'm the same way with videogames, which means I'm more likely to pick a sequel over a new IP on the basis that because I liked the last one, I'll probably enjoy this new one too. Of course, it doesn't always work out for me and Vortex Software's *Alien Highway: Encounter 2* is a good example of that.

I adored the original and the intense shooting action that it offered, so when I heard that a sequel was on the way I saved up some cash, bought a copy and booted it up. And to be honest, my first impressions of it were actually pretty good.

It takes the same approach as the original game, so it's still isometric, it still involves mowing down waves of aliens and it still requires a bomb to be pushed to the end of each stage. It's quicker than the original game too, but I just didn't enjoy it like I enjoyed the original.

Numerous changes were made by Mark Haigh-Hutchinson to make it distinct to Costa Panayi's original game, and while I understand the reasoning, they don't really work for me. The biggest change is that you now have to shift the game's bomb around yourself rather than leaving it to your spare lives to do. In fact, you only get one life now, which makes your gargantuan task even tougher. Add in the fact that the sides of the highway are now electrified, sapping your precious energy on contact, and *Alien Highway* becomes a sequel that frustrates rather than delights. What a shame. ✱

MAGAZINE CRAFT

JULIAN RIGNALL

With a knack for quickly identifying and reacting to shifts and patterns in games media, much in the same way he did when notching up videogame high scores, Julian Rignall launched some of the most prominent and successful gaming magazines in the UK. We chat to him about his career, his mags and being a videogame influencer decades before the term was ever coined

Words by Stuart Hunt

THEN

Starting out writing game tips for early computer magazines, Julian got his first job at *ZZap!64* before joining EMAP where he worked on *CVG* and then later launched the iconic console magazine *Mean Machines*. He would also launch the first official UK Sega and Nintendo magazines.

NOW

After leaving the UK to be a games consultant in the US, Julian returned to games media to help launch what would become IGN. These days he works as a freelance writer and market research analyst specialising in videogames. He has also recently written a book charting his journey through gaming history.

What is the first videogame you remember playing, Julian?
It was *Pong* in Woolworths in late 1976. I walked into the shop with my mum and headed over to the electronics counter. At that point calculators were still kind of new and any kind of tech was cool. This one visit though they had a *Pong* machine hooked up to a TV and there were a couple of kids playing on it. It blew me away. When the kids got dragged away by their parents, I jumped on it and thought it was the greatest thing ever.

When did you first become aware of home computers?
So that was very late-1976. My brother was into electronics, so he used to get the Maplin catalogue. I used to flick through it, and I saw an advert for these very early computer kits. I think one came with a *Space Invaders*-type game, so that was when I became aware of computers and games. In 1980, my school got a couple of PET computers and immediately kids began messing about with them. I remember someone got hold of *Nightmare Park*, which is a sort of mini text-based game, and this simple horse-race betting game where the horses were pi symbols.

And arcade games, when did you discover those?
I discovered arcade games at around the same time. I'd already seen *Space Invaders* on a family holiday in 1979. In 1980, I found *Asteroids* and was beginning to get good at that – that's when I realised that I was pretty good at playing these electronic games. At that time the industry was also starting to take off, with the launch of early computer mags like *CVG*.

Were you buying computer mags at the time?
No. It was weird really. I didn't have a computer and very early *CVG* was all a bit dry. It was all type-in listings and there weren't really any game reviews. The only thing inside the magazine that interested me, apart from the little bit of gaming news, was the Arcade Action pages, so I'd just sort of go into WHSmith, read it, and then put it back on the shelf. It wasn't until 1983, when I got a second-hand Atari 400 with a ton of games, and my brother got a ZX Spectrum, and *CVG* started to review games and show screenshots, that I thought this is worth buying.

You were a bit of a high-score wizard in your youth. How did you get so good at videogames?
I was going into Aberystwyth every weekend and just playing these games. When I found *Space Invaders* that was interesting because I had this sort of aha moment on the way home. Often things will get into my head, and I will go into this sort of hyper-focus mode where my brain chews on it. I'd just try to figure out how to beat it. Gradually, I refined my tactics and was posting these big high scores.

What arcade games did you enjoy most and get good at?
After *Space Invaders*, I started playing *Asteroids* and *Missile Command* and got very good at those. I didn't figure out *Missile Command* for ages, but I remember I would reset the machine because I would earn more than 256 lives. I guess the machine couldn't handle the overflow or count that high. I also remember causing

» Bitmap Books' *The Games Of A Lifetime* by Julian is on sale now and reviewed on page 96.

smoke to come out of the back of an *Asteroids* machine once. I seemed to have these machine-melting skills.

> "I also remember causing smoke to come out of the back of an Asteroids machine once. I seemed to have these machine-melting skills"
> JULIAN RIGNALL

Tell us about the first videogame tournament you entered?

I walked into WHSmith in spring 1983 and saw on the cover of *CVG* that they were running an arcade tournament, and so I sent in my high scores. There were a handful of games, like *Robotron: 2084* and *Defender*, and you had ten minutes to notch up the highest score. The winner on each machine then went to the final and played a mystery game – which was Konami's *Gyruss*. Nobody had even seen it before. It was kind of a bit of luck that that was always my schtick – rapidly learning games. I guess that's what made me quite an effective reviewer at the time.

That led to you writing tips for computing mags, is that right?

Not long after the tournament I discovered *Pole Position*. I've always loved racing games, and it left me breathless the first time I played it. It had this huge impact on me, and I immediately wanted to write some tips for it. I sent those into *CVG*, and they got published. That's when I realised that's what I wanted to do. I began to send in more tips to *CVG* and *Personal Computer Games*, which was run by Chris Anderson.

What led to you getting your break as a games journalist?

At the end of 1984, *Personal Computer Games* hosted a similar contest with some of the best gamers in the country. Around six of us were invited to the *PCG* offices and that was how I met Gary Penn. We didn't win the tournament, and that was partly because we got a bit drunk at lunchtime. We were 18 or 19 at the time, and many of the other competitors were quite a bit younger than us. We got a bit merry, and it blunted our performances. The good thing ▶

My MAGAZINE COVER

"This is tough because I've worked with some of the greatest gaming magazine cover artists of all time. Oli Frey, Jerry Paris, these were the people that really got it. And it was a great experience working with Oli on cover ideas and seeing those come together. They're his paintings and they were all fantastic. I'm not going to pick one of those ones for that specific reason. So, the one I'm going with is the *Mean Machines*' Mario hologram Christmas 1991 cover, which was us; it wasn't an artist. We did all the legwork and figured out how to manufacture a colour hologram. It was just brilliant, and I don't think anyone had ever done anything like that at the time. I remember seeing it on the shelf in WHSmith and the light hitting it just right. It wasn't this stunning painting; it was like sci-fi."

I REMEMBER WHEN

CONNECTING THE BOTS

"I remember playing *BattleTech* in Chicago in 1990. It was this PC-driven, 16-player, modern PVP FPS game. Having never seen anything like that before, I remember thinking this is where gaming is going. When that wire connecting everything becomes infinite, we'll all be doing this."

I REMEMBER WHEN

BRUTAL REVIEWS

"At one time, I was playing and writing reviews for two games a day; one before lunchtime and one after – it was brutal. Some of these were like rock-hard C64 games, with random deaths and stuff. I would just brute force my way through them and then let them have it if it was crap."

» [Arcade] *Pole Position* was the game that inspired Julian to write tips and send them into computer magazines – setting him on the road to a legendary career in game journalism.

» [Arcade] A big fan of *Defender*, when Julian got the chance to interview its creator, Eugene Jarvis, in 2015, it was the first time he ever felt starstruck.

My BEST PRESS TRIP

LAGUNA SECA, MONTEREY

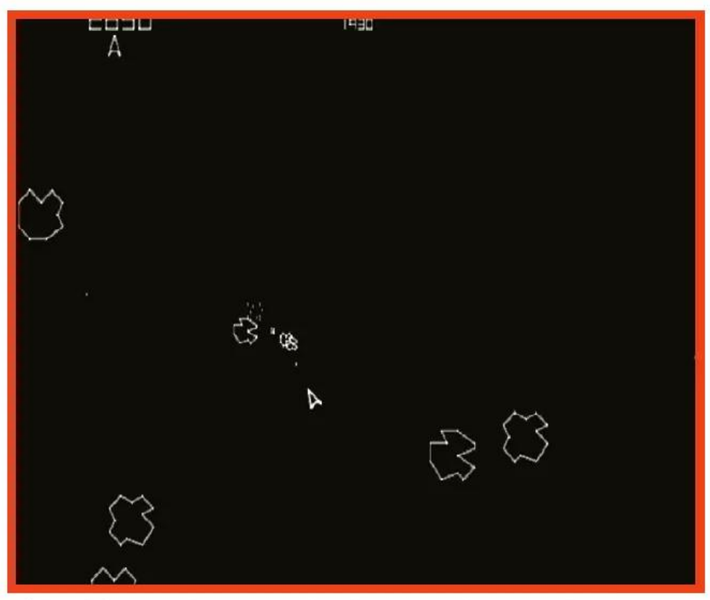
Given Julian's adoration for *Pole Position*, and the huge impact it had on his life – by inspiring him to write and send in tips to computer mags, it's perhaps no surprise that his favourite press events involved sitting behind the wheel of a fast car. "I've done a bunch of driving ones and those were always great," smiles Julian. "When Gremlin Graphics launched *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge*, I got to drive a Lotus Esprit and Elan around the Lotus factory test track as fast as I could go – scaring myself. I also got to drive Formula Fords around Laguna Seca in Monterey. That was fantastic, and they also let us loose on a Dodge Viper, which was fun. I think that trip was for one of the Codemasters' racing games. I also got to spend a day driving Ford XR2is around Brands Hatch for a Microprose event. My favourite press trips have always involved racing games, cars and events."

▶ though was that we got chatting to Chris Anderson about different things.

Why was that? Please tell us.
Well, a little while after, I got a call from Chris who said he had just landed a job at this new company called Newsfield. I knew of *Crash* magazine, as I had been reading that and thought it was really good. He was setting up a Commodore magazine and felt I would be a good fit for it, so I travelled down to London for an interview. I didn't tell him I didn't own a C64 as I had an Atari 400 and there were quite a few games on both systems, so I was able to bluff it. Then a week later I got a formal offer.

> "It was kind of a bit of luck that that was always my schtick – rapidly learning games. I guess that's what made me quite an effective reviewer at the time"
> JULIAN RIGNALL

Tell us about your time on *Zzap!64*. What was that like?
I think there really was something special about that early *Zzap!64* team. Even though Crash came out as this early single-format magazine, I think *Zzap* had the first industry influencers. Gary Penn and I, we weren't really journalists; we were gamers, and I guess influencers by the modern definition. Loving games, personality-driven, less about formal journalism and not quite professional. People really seemed to respond to that. It was initially good, but because the team was so young, and there wasn't someone there to manage things day to day, it quickly became weirdly fractured. As a result, there was a bit of a revolving door with people coming and going.



» [Arcade] *Asteroids* – one of the classic arcade games that succumbed to Julian's peculiar machine-melting skills.

Why did you decide to eventually leave *Zzap!64*
It was a combination of that and me wanting to add Amiga stuff to the magazine and being told no. If I recall, I think we had put some Amiga coverage in *Zzap!64* and received a few letters from readers moaning about it. I argued that the Commodore 64 wasn't going to be there forever, and the magazine needed to evolve. After all the effort and time that I had put into the magazine, I was upset and within a few weeks I decided to leave. That happened just at the time I'd seen the PC Engine in *CVG* and began taking an interest in these Japanese consoles. As soon as I saw those, I knew I needed to go and write about them.

You then joined EMAP as the deputy editor of *CVG*. What was that change like?
It was weird – I arrived at these dusty EMAP offices full of typewriters. We'd been using word processors at Newsfield, so it was like going back to this traditional old-school newsroom environment. They understood that they needed to change things, so that's what I did. *CVG* seemed to be in doldrums and a bit stuck, so Graham Taylor, who had previously worked on *Sinclair User*, and had done a great job on that magazine, became the new editor and I was deputy editor.

How did you put your own stamp on the magazine?
Graham asked me what I would do with *CVG*,

» For more insight into the creation of *Mean Machines*, seek out the making-of feature published in issue 15 of the magazine.

so I just let him have it. I went in hard because I realised that if he didn't want to change things then I needed to move on, and if he did then he would want to hear this. Thankfully, he said you run the magazine, and I'll do all the business stuff, and very quickly we turned things around. It only took a couple of issues to enter playgrounds with the PC Engine on it, for the mag to start flying off the shelves. Once I eventually became the formal editor, I was able to hire Paul Glancey, who was just brilliant and had worked with me at *Zzap!64*. We then added more people, such as Paul Rand and others, as time went on.

Didn't Mean Machines start out as a section within *CVG*?

Yes. It was a column written by Tony Takoushi about what was happening in the Far East. It would cover Nintendo consoles and Master System stuff. I had already seen the NES, at Activision, while on a press trip. I saw *Super Mario Bros* and thought it was unbelievable. When Tony started talking about that stuff, I was like great – more of that please. When he eventually left, I took it over and became the console guy.

When did you decide to spin *Mean Machines* out into its own magazine?

A few things happened. We began to see the very first import ads coming in and I remember saying to Graham that people are importing games, there's obviously a movement in the market. Also, through market research we saw that readers were becoming more interested in the console coverage. We talked about it and Graham said we couldn't launch a magazine yet as it's not proven, so we made the *Complete Guide To Consoles*. It was this *CVG* special we did that had everything in it – from the Atari 2600 to the latest machines. We put it out there and it completely sold out, so we were like OK, the time is ready for a console magazine.

> "It only took a couple of issues to enter playgrounds with the PC Engine on it, for the mag to start flying off the shelves"
> JULIAN RIGNALL

When it split into *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*, was it difficult maintaining the same editorial tone on an official Nintendo mag?

Most of the heavy lifting had been done during the negotiation. What we said was, you can't mess about with editorial – if we say something bad that is off-brand, you can nail us for that. They understood the argument that this is a Nintendo-branded product and if you interfere with the editorial then its credibility would be shot, and we were going to talk about it. I think the argument that swung it was that I said there's going to be X number of games each month, and there's going to be a couple of good ones and a couple of bad ones, and ultimately you want the kids to buy the good ones so that they have a good experience and come back.

As well as Nintendo, you also helped to launch the first official Sega magazine in the UK: *Sega Magazine*. ▶

My PROUDEST MOMENT

"I think it comes back to being one of the earliest videogame influencers. Before Gary Penn and me, there were a few personalities here and there. I think we helped to define the modern influencer – we were real gamers, with personality, being 'unprofessional' – according to many 'professional' journalists who didn't like what we were doing. But we figured it out and had it not been for Chris Anderson; we wouldn't have done that. He also had the vision of there being something important about letting these personalities shine in the mag."

I REMEMBER WHEN

HARROD'S DUMMY RUN

"I brought Gary Harrod in to create the dummy issue of *Mean Machines* as a freelancer, with the understanding that if it goes well, he'd have the job. He painted a few early covers before the design work increased and we started using marketing assets and artwork."

My BEST INTERVIEW

EUGENE JARVIS

Having worked in the industry for so long, it's no surprise that asking Julian to pick a single favourite interview from the many he's done over the years was a bit of a struggle. However, we did manage to whittle it down to two – and weirdly, both happened in the same year. "In 2015, I got to interview Eugene Jarvis. That was the first time I ever felt starstruck," shares Julian. "It was the fact that I had played his games as a kid, to the highest possible level, and was able to ask him all the questions I had about his games. I just couldn't believe I was speaking to this legendary guy who made *Defender* – a game I played, loved and had won a championship with, and now I could ask him about the overflow buffer bug and all this other stuff. The other was interviewing the Lucasfilm games guys in 2015 at GDC. In 1985, I had flown out with Gary Penn to California to interview the same team at Skywalker Ranch. It was our first press trip anywhere and it was unbelievable, walking around the ranch and seeing things like Luke Skywalker's lightsaber on the sideboard – not even under glass, you could poke it. Fast forward 30 years, and it was great speaking to them again about what they had done in that time".

Having made it to the BMX course, Paperboy decides it isn't worth the effort and falls off his bike
Why bothered to convert Paperboy to the 64, I don't know. As far as I'm concerned it was a waste of time, effort and money. The tunes and spot FX are good, but the backdrops and sprites are rather crude, and the colour schemes are bland. The playing area is relatively small, leaving little room to manoeuvre and resulting in much frustration. Even so, Paperboy is quite playable, but nothing special and vastly overpriced for what it offers. If Elite are going to continue releasing conversions of this quality, then they should do so at a budget price.
PRESENTATION 78%
No options, but reasonable title screen and high-score feature.
GRAPHICS 48%
Simple backdrops, badly drawn and animated sprites, and bland use of colour.
SOUND 79%
Good tunes and spot FX ice a poor baked cake.
VALUE FOR MONEY 35%
US Gold, £9.99 cass, £14.99 disk, joystick only
I wasn't that impressed by Paperboy when I saw it in the arcades, and now it's come home to roost I'm neither enthralled nor excited by it's arrival. It appears to be hit or miss whether I was killed at when I hit an obstacle – sometimes I could quite happily sail through the hazards and the next time I'd be killed before hitting it. This might have some appeal to ardent fans of the arcade game, but it left me feeling cold.
The arcade version of Xevious is graphically pretty and fun to play. The official Commodore conversion however, is graphically awful and very dull to play. The background graphics are really dire and they look muddled and unimaginatively. The sprites are terrible, lacking colour and definition, and everything wobblies as it moves. The spaceship is very sluggish to respond to the joystick and it moves very slowly. Consequently the original game's addictive qualities are lost. Why this is so bad is a complete mystery to me – it could have been so much better, especially if you compare it with the standards set by Light Force. If you want a good shoot 'em up forget this garbage and look elsewhere.
A large Mothership appears at regular intervals and can only be destroyed with a well placed bomb. Dispose of the Mothership and the mission continues, only the aliens get meaner and faster
This is quite playable, but it's all so slow and reluctant to do anything exciting – even when provoked. It's enough to put you to sleep. The aliens come down at a snail's pace and their shots jerk across the screen. The spinning mirrors look more like slates than mirrors, and they seem to flap down the screen rather than spin. A banal tune plays throughout the game, and combined with the ear-grating spot FX I was driven up the wall. Ten quid is a lot to pay for such a slow and monotonous shoot 'em up.

» After writing tips for *Personal Computer Games* and *CVG*, Julian got his first proper writing gig as a staff writer on *Zzap!64*. He later became its editor.

I literally did the first issue. It was a nice way to finish things off and kind of funny as I think I may be the only person who has ever worked on an official Nintendo magazine and a Sega one – certainly launched both. Mean Machines Sega was at its peak when *Sega Magazine* launched. I already had a good relationship with Sega, and Mean Machines Sega was kind of seen as the official Sega magazine anyway, just not in name. So, we met with them and said why don't we just create an official Sega magazine for you and turn Mean Machines Sega back into its own crazy thing.

How did the style of *Sega Magazine* differ to that of *Mean Machines Sega*?

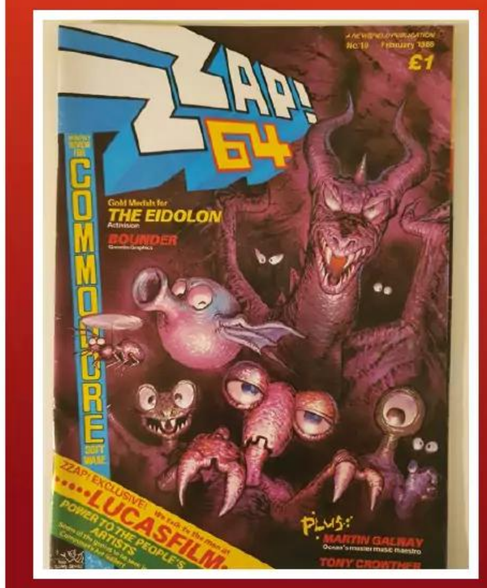
We knew the magazine market was beginning to grow, and people were still playing gamers into their 20s with stuff like *John Madden* and *Desert Strike*. There was a new older market,

> "They understood the argument that this is a Nintendo-branded product and if you interfere with the editorial then its credibility would be shot"
> JULIAN RIGNALL

and this suited Sega perfectly. We came to them and said the mag's not going to be anarchic; it's going to be more like what *Edge* was – which was also reflecting that shift in the market. We said we could make this beautiful, clean looking magazine that's going to really look upmarket, and they liked the idea.

Why did you decide to make the move to America and work in game development?

I went out to Virgin Interactive Entertainment on assignment to see their games, and I remember sharing my opinions, like I always did, on what was good and what could be better. So, they said why don't you move over here and do that for us full time. This also came about at a time when I wanted to launch an *Edge* competitor at EMAP. I pitched the idea of this magazine called *Tekno*, but it was turned down. Whereas *Edge* was very straight, it would have had more humour, and so I think they would have coexisted quite well together. I was looking for something new and this job offer came along, so I went for it. I worked in game development for a few years until the parts of Virgin Interactive in the US were eventually bought by EA.



» [PC Engine] It was seeing the PC Engine in *CVG* that got Julian interested in Japanese consoles and wanting to write about them.

» [Arcade] Konami's *Gyruss* – the mystery game that Julian faced in the final of his first ever video game tournament.

Tell us how you came to be involved with the launch of IGN?
The timing of the sale coincided with me reconnecting with Chris Anderson, who had moved to San Francisco and been getting into web stuff. I was in LA at that point and had been into the web as soon as I got off the plane in America. I got AOL, got online and thought this is the future, and that I've got to be doing this. Chris had a few gaming websites, and I literally just called him up and said, "Hey, it's Jaz, how are you doing? I see you have this magazine company in San Francisco. I'm looking for a job." At the time he had these different gaming websites – the official websites for the magazines. We discussed bringing them together as a network. So, I got on the plane to San Francisco and met with his team.

What were those early days of IGN like?
At the time, the print was still the focus, so they had put all their most junior guys on the web stuff. The editors were expecting them to upload the content from the magazine to the web two months after it had appeared in the magazines. It was crazy and I remember having this conversation with Chris where we discussed publishing things immediately on the web. We put the magazine websites into a network and had the web teams writing and posting things every day. And of course, the rest is history, because the Imagine Games Network (IGN) very quickly took off and became a massive success. I think at one point; we were in the top twenty websites in the world, in terms of size, and that was probably within two years.

For a time, you left the industry to pursue interests in e-commerce and marketing. Is that right?
I was at the point of being burnt out by the industry and was no longer doing the fun stuff. I could see the internet was going to become a big e-commerce thing and I also wanted to learn more about marketing. So, I perused that. I worked for Walmart, helping to run their website so I could learn about e-commerce. I also worked for an ad agency doing all the advertising for Dell computers for a few years. Doing that led me into specialist publishing at Future, where we set up this new division that offered custom publishing and official magazines. We did all sorts, from the official *World Of Warcraft Magazine* to a crocheting magazine for one of the biggest yarn companies in America.

» Issue 0 of *Mean Machines* – the dummy issue created by Julian and Gary Harrod. It was reprinted in issue 15 of *Mean Machines*.

We understand you have a book coming out soon with Bitmap Books. Can you tell us about that?
Basically, it's my journey through gaming history through a first-person perspective and I'm trying to make it also a bit of a gaming time machine. What I've done, which is very important to me, is to tell you how I felt at the time, how people felt at the time and what the attitudes were at the time to give those games actual context – like, what it actually felt like seeing *Robotron* for the first time and how amazing that was, rather than a more academic take on what these games brought to the table. It's things like how it felt seeing *Pole Position* for the first time and feeling my jaw drop. Or playing an early MMO – where it was just these brutal environments, where you're just in the middle of nowhere and you've lost all this precious stuff after getting killed. It's about bringing all these moments together, and there are plenty of them. The book is finished and is out now. *

My FUTURE CLASSIC

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 3

"I think classic games aren't really decided by us, but by those in the future. History will be the judge. Modern games are all I do play; I don't play any old games – I'm a scorched-earth person. I'm playing *Infinity Nikki* now. I don't even know what I'm doing playing that game, but I just love it. I'm also a crazy *Call Of Duty* player. I can't believe that I'm as old as I am and can still play it as well as I do."

> "I already had a good relationship with Sega, and Mean Machines Sega was kind of seen as the official Sega magazine anyway, just not in name"
> JULIAN RIGNALL

I REMEMBER WHEN

BRUCE-ALLY HONEST
"I remember during the *PCG* competition speaking to Chris Anderson about *CVG*'s review of *Bruce Lee*, which I thought they had messed up because I had bought the game thinking it was going to be difficult, and I finished it in a night. I think it was that chat that got me considered for *Zzap!64*."

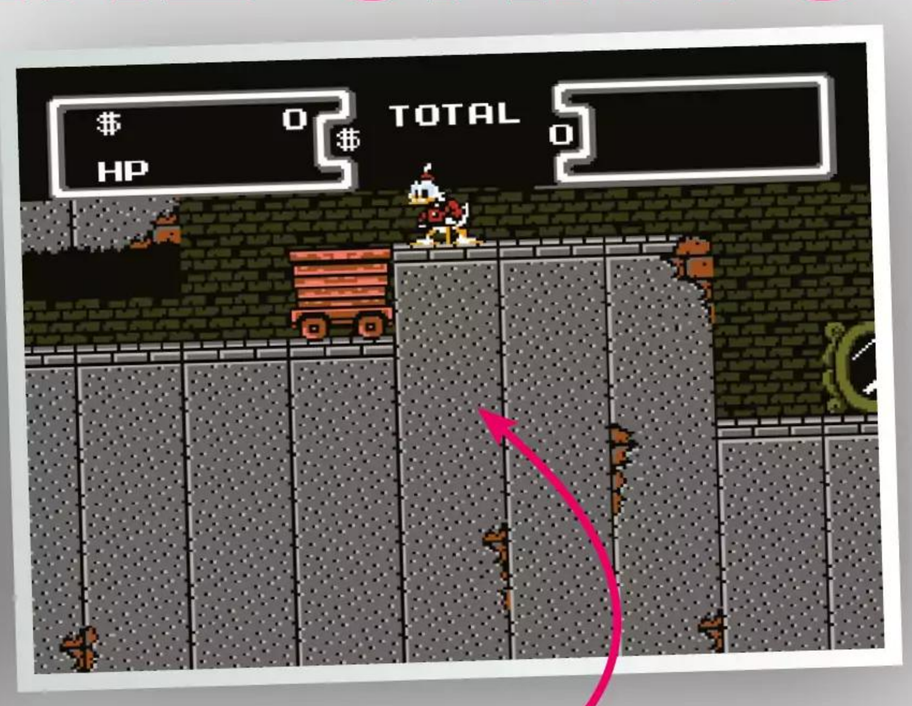
retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

GAMES WITH MINE CARTS

Ever since a certain gorilla leaped into a mine cart in the mid-1990s, David Crookes has become a little obsessed with riding on-rail cars in videogames. Here's how he likes to get his fix

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

■ It's actually possible to avoid playing Donkey Kong's first ever mine-carting jaunt (on all but the Game Boy Color version) but to do so means missing out on one of *Country*'s most iconic levels. Sure, it's tricky but it's also tremendous fun as you freewheel forward on segmented rail tracks, timing your jumps to avoid the myriad hazards while seeking to collect items.



DISNEY'S DUCKTALES

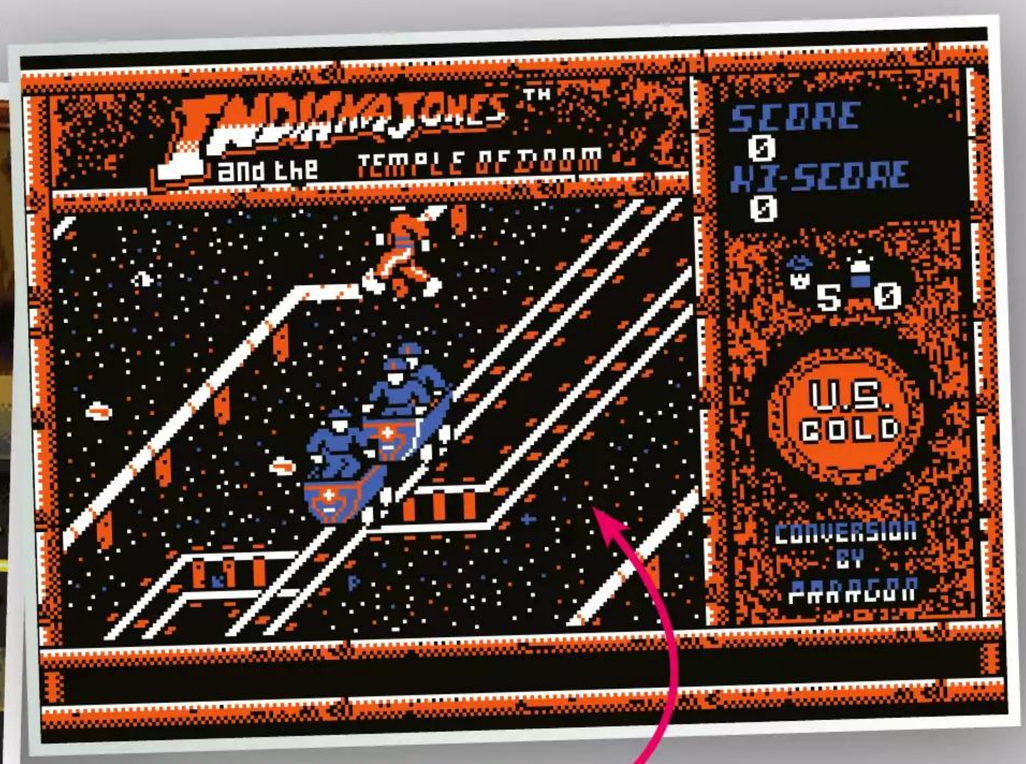
■ Released in 1989, *DuckTales* was a classic platformer for the NES and it brought the TV series of the same name to life. Aside from pogoing around the various levels and seeing off nasties, there's a fun, yet all-too-brief section in which you have to leap into a trio of unstoppable mine carts, wait for them to move and leap out just before they scarily plummet to the ground.

GILLIGAN'S GOLD

■ Ocean Software's 8-bit clone of *Bagman* has an abundance of mine carts and, as well as dropping bags of gold into them (and trying to avoid getting run over), you can leap to the ceiling, wait for one to pass, and fall down to enjoy a ride. It makes for a nice, early novel spin on the platform genre.

GUNSTAR HEROES

■ Having completed the first level, thinking *Gunstar Heroes* was pretty much nailing the run-and-gun genre, in rolled the Underground Mine level and turned expectations on their head – quite literally, in fact. Not only were you getting to speed across the ground in a mine cart, you were traversing the ceiling too, flipping between both en route to an almighty boss battle.

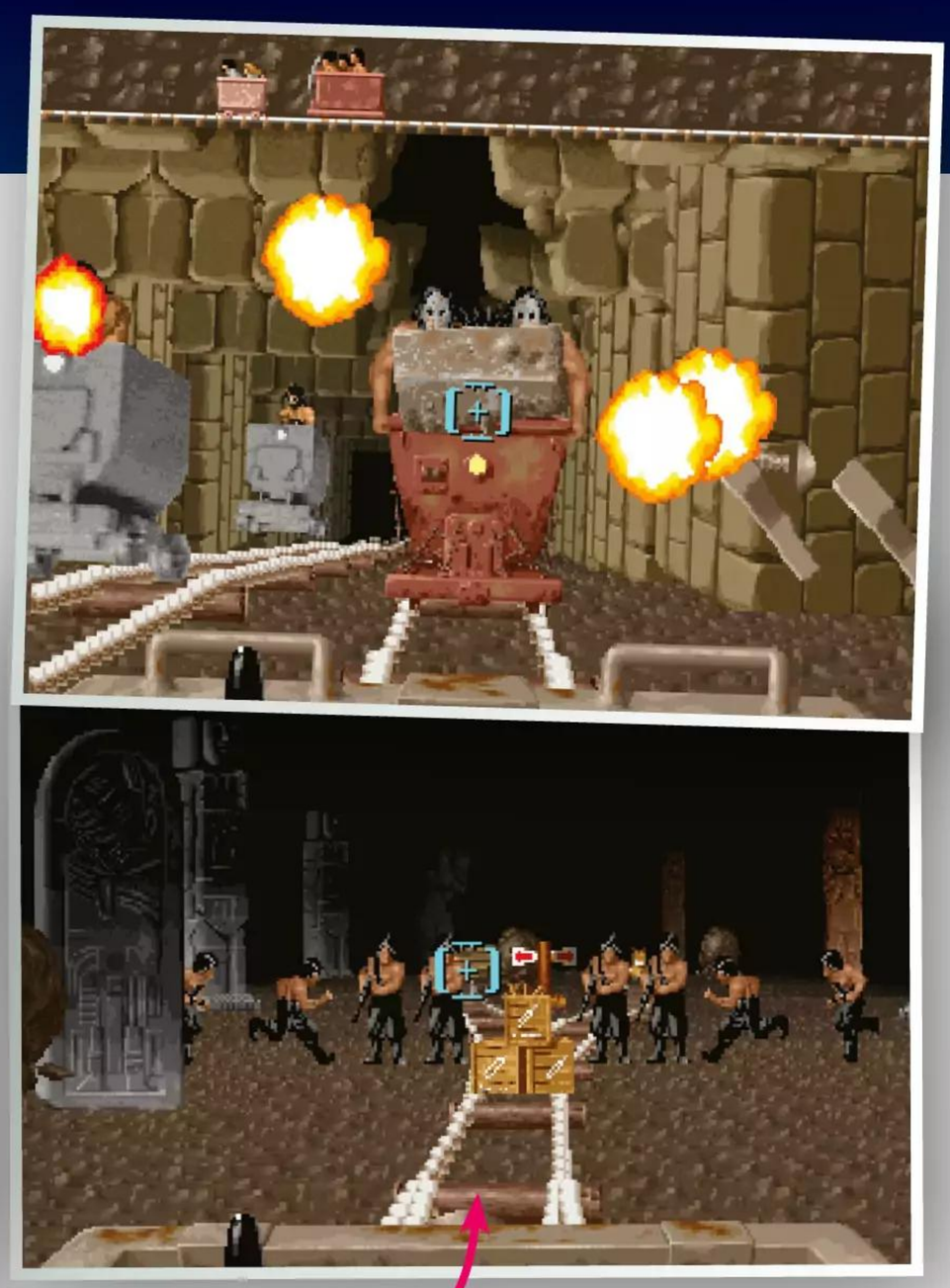


INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM

■ The developers had a job-and-a-half on their hands, trying to replicate the exhilarating mine cart chase of this particular movie – arguably one of the finest chases of all time. And, you know, they did it well. There would be a great smile on your face as you relentlessly whipped the tailing Thuggee guards while seeking to avoid derailing the cart or smashing into dead ends.

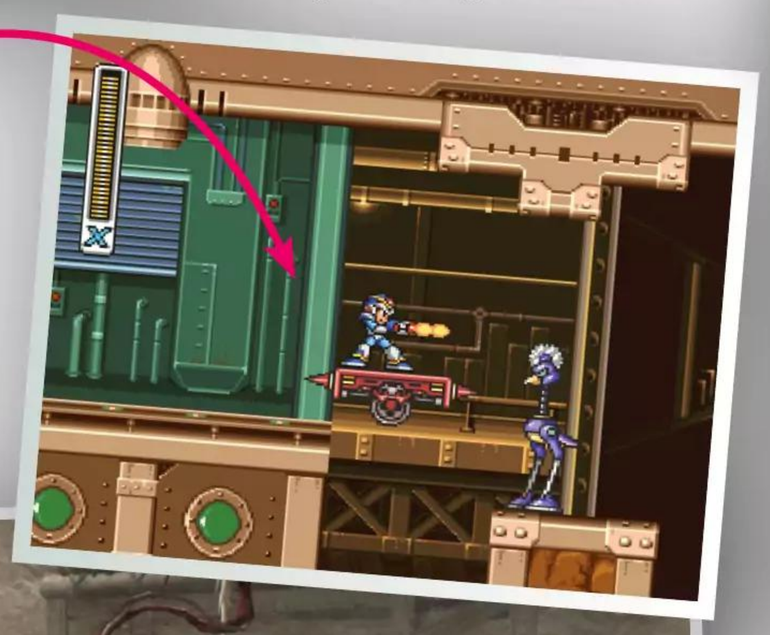
JOE & MAC 2

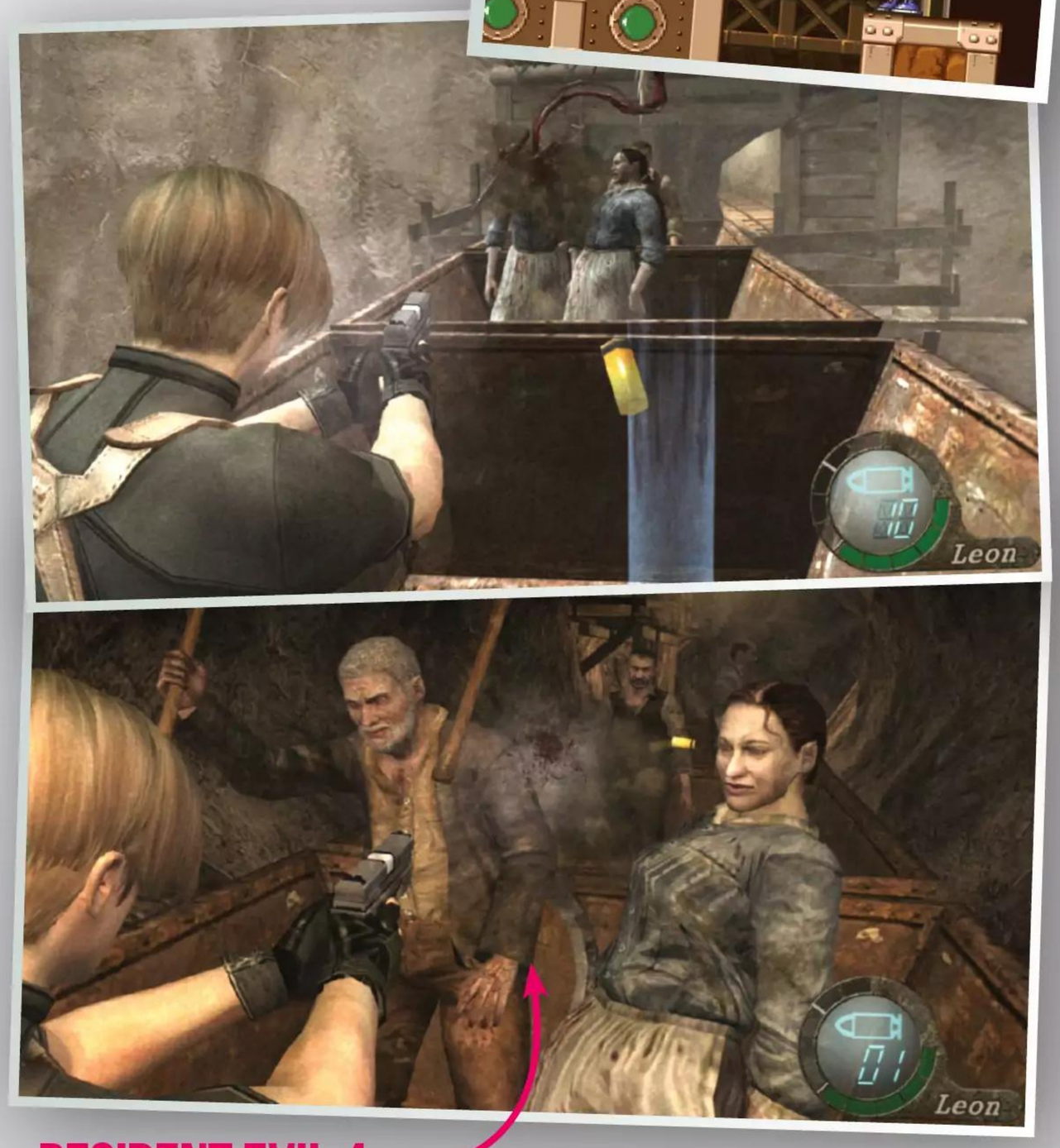
■ Enjoyable if only for the expressions alone, the early mine cart section in *Joe & Mac 2* warned of a wild ride and it wasn't wrong. You needed to get the timings right as you leapt, avoided enemies and tried to grab items and coins – once accomplished, you'd then watch it smash to the ground with great satisfaction.



MEGA MAN X

■ You may not recognise them as mine carts, per se, but the action is taking place deep underground so we'd say these little vehicles fit the bill. This particular model is fitted with lethal spikes back and front to nail the enemies so you can enjoy the ride, making sure you leap away before its final, fatal fall.



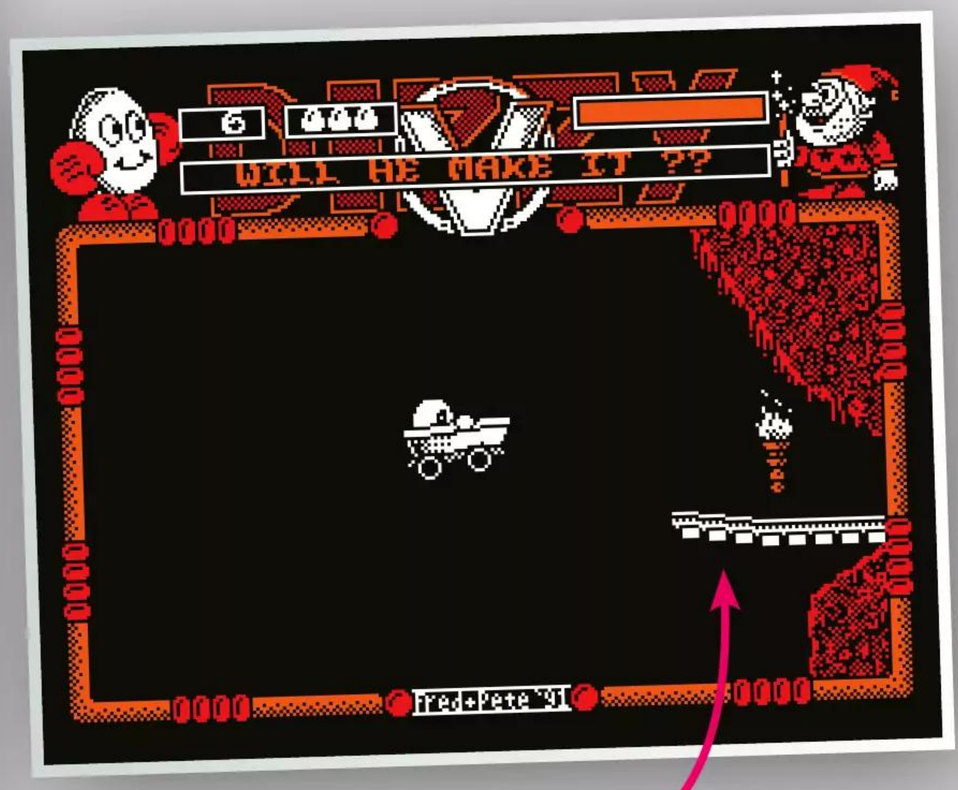


RESIDENT EVIL 4

■ The fast and furious mine cart ride in this GameCube classic will always be a favourite because you have to keep your wits about you as waves of Ganado and other assorted nasties seek to stop you in your tracks (and enter the carts for some up-close-and-personal attempts at murder). The speedier it gets, the more challenging it becomes. Oh, and don't forget the leap at the track's end.

RAIL CHASE

■ Released in the arcades in Japan and North America, you may one day come across this Sega rail shooter coin-op in real-life and appreciate its qualities as a physical motion ride above all else. Based entirely around mine carts, you're literally just spending a heap of time (and money) shooting. Still, a bit of mindless fun never hurt anyone (maybe).



SPELLBOUND DIZZY

■ As you'd expect, the mine cart forms part of one of *Spellbound Dizzy*'s puzzles. But figure it out and you can watch gaming's egg-cellent hero in a cool setpiece. He cascades down the tracks at some speed, leaving your heart in your mouth. You don't quite know what's coming next as the cart suddenly runs out of railroad and leaps through the air…

TURRICAN II: THE FINAL FIGHT

INFO

» **ORIGINAL VERSION RELEASE:** 1991

» **PC RELEASE:** 1995

» **CONVERSION CODER:** SEBASTIAN MIES, MARC HELLWIG, FABIAN IHLENFELD

» **AVERAGE SCORE:** 86%

Sebastian Mies
Sebastian was the lead programmer of the *Turrican II* PC version. After wrapping up his PhD in computer science, he moved to the US and has worked for companies such as Google, YouTube and Airbnb ever since.

Thomas Brockhage
Thomas was head of development at Rainbow Arts and producer of the PC version of *Turrican II*. He went on to found Conspiracy Entertainment and still works in the games industry from time to time.

Manfred Trenz's Turrican II is one of the really, really great home-computer classics that has shot its way into the hearts of all run-and-gun fans, especially its 1991 Amiga incarnation. But did you know that almost five years later there was a much-improved conversion for DOS computers?

Words by Paul Kautz

***Turrican II: The Final Fight* is an important chapter in the history of German action games: released in 1991 by Rainbow Arts for Amiga and C64, it was a technical marvel on both platforms and quickly conquered the hearts of all shoot-em-up fans with its large, open levels and breathless action.**

In the months that followed, the game was ported to the Atari ST, CDTV, ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC. However, there was another version that rarely ever gets mentioned, probably because it hit the market almost five years after the game's original release! We are, of course, talking about the MS-DOS version of *Turrican II*, which began development at the end of 1992. That's when then 16-year-old Sebastian Mies picked up the phone to reach someone at Rainbow Arts to present the programming routine he had developed to enable smooth eight-way scrolling on VGA graphics cards. On the other end of the line was Thomas Brockhage, then head of development at Rainbow Arts, "Sebastian approached us because he really wanted to make a game with his impressive technology. We quickly agreed on *Turrican II* as it was one of his favourite titles. We then sent him all the game assets from the Amiga, the code, graphics and sound, and they went straight to work."

The "they" were not only Sebastian, but also his two friends Marc Hellwig and Fabian Ihlenfeld, who he brought onboard to work on the project as well. The three of them, all still in high school at the time, called themselves Sun-Project and quickly ported *Turrican II*'s first world to the PC, raising hopes that the finished game would be released by the end of 1993. This hope was soon to be shattered, however, for several reasons, according to Sebastian, "School, idealism, a lot of naivety, a lack of experience and discipline and of course occasional conflicts within the team."

Most importantly, the game was a massive technical challenge. The three were enthusiastic and talented programmers, but the Amiga version of *Turrican II* was programmed so close to the hardware that, according to Thomas, the problems seemed overwhelming, "The Amiga and PC architectures were so different that for a while we thought about cancelling the project. Some really complex problems had to be solved, such as the lack of line interrupts or any reliable timing information on the PC. As a result, even seemingly trivial things like separating the status bar from the actual playing field turned into unexpectedly difficult problems."

As a result, the PC version of *Turrican II* was not released at the end of 1993 as originally planned, but in October 1995. It was the familiar Amiga game, but somehow different. The reason for this, according to Thomas, was

» [PC] In terms of content, the PC *Turrican II* was 100% the same as its Amiga brother, there were no extra levels or other enhancements – with the exception of (optionally) slightly better sounding music.

> "PCs back then weren't made for arcade games"
> SEBASTIAN MIES

that the Amiga version didn't look good on PC monitors, "Originally we had planned to simply rescale the Amiga graphics to the usual 320x200 VGA resolution, but doing so made *Turrican II* suddenly looked quite crumby and blocky. The alternative was to scrap it all and repaint everything natively in VGA resolution. A huge amount of work, but luckily we had really good pixel artists in-house who were keen to work on the project."

The artists, Jørgen Trolle Ørberg and Bjoern Naesby Nielsen from the Danish development team Brain Bug, left no stone unturned: Pretty much all sprites, background

» [PC] *Turrican II* featured large, partially open levels with multiple paths leading to the goal.

» [PC] One of the graphical features of the PC version was the colourful VGA backgrounds, which were particularly effective in the first two worlds.

objects, bosses and even the floor tiles have been redrawn for the PC conversion – always as close to the original as possible, but with significantly more colours and detail. If you compare the result to the Amiga version of *Turrican II*, the differences jump out at you like a starving Facehugger. The PC version is much more colourful than the original, as you can see in the first level, with beautiful gradients in the background and smoothly animated waterfalls. This qualifies the PC version of *Turrican II* as one of the first major remasters in videogame history.

But even beyond the colour overkill, *Turrican II* on the PC was a technical masterpiece: the eight-way scrolling is remarkably smooth and, depending on the world, offers up to seven layers of parallax scrolling. "PCs back then were simply not made for arcade games," Sebastian says. "We had to dig deep into our bag of tricks, especially when it came to graphics programming."

Bringing the music to the PC was also a major headache. After all, Chris Huelsbeck's compositions are considered timeless masterpieces for a reason, and the developers intended to transfer

HOW ACCURATE IS IT?

How the PC Turrican II differs from the Amiga original

A brand-new graphical look

■ The Amiga version was written in 16-colour mode. The PC version, on the other hand, uses the full 256 colours of the VGA palette, giving it a more natural look and more graphical effects than the original.

Original soundtrack+

■ Thanks to Sebastian's native TFMX player, Chris Huelsbeck's epic soundtrack can be heard in all its original glory. An oversampling function can also be used to enhance the listening experience, although this required a very powerful PC at the time.

Redrawn sprites

■ Virtually all the sprites, background objects, bosses and floor tiles have been skillfully redrawn. The bosses look more powerful than in the original, but the Turrican sprite in particular looks a little chubby.

All the content

■ All levels, all enemies, all bosses, all weapons, all power-ups: The developers didn't cut any corners, the DOS *Turrican II* brings everything the Amiga original had to offer. But unfortunately nothing more, which was a bit disappointing after all these years.

» [PC] Most of the background artwork has been significantly improved – especially in the alien world, which shows some disturbing new detail.

» [PC] All graphical elements have been repainted in 256 colours for the PC version. This includes the hero sprite, which unfortunately looks less elegant than in the original.

them to the PC as faithfully as possible. The problem was the format: TFMX was an Amiga-only system with no true PC equivalent. So, instead of converting all the music from TFMX to MOD and accepting a possible loss of sound quality, Sebastian decided on a more pragmatic solution: he simply wrote his own TFMX player for Sound Blaster cards. Again, a lot of work and time, but the result is that the music sounds 100% original on the PC. A hair better even, because the slightly unfortunate named PMS Player (which stands for Professional Music System Player) offered an oversampling function which allowed a higher sound quality on very powerful machines.

> "For a while we thought about cancelling the project"
> THOMAS BROCKHAGE

In terms of content, Sun-Project avoided experiments – the PC *Turrican II* offered the familiar game: The hero Bren McGuire runs, jumps and shoots his way through five worlds, divided into eleven large and open levels. In the third world, Bren climbs aboard his trusty spaceship, whizzes past a Katakis satellite and engages in three levels of incredibly fast-paced scrolling shooter combat. At the time, it was hard to believe that this kind of arcade perfection was possible on a standard DOS PC. There were already similar games on the PC, such as *Prototype*, the conversion of the Amiga classic *Project-X* and *Tubular Worlds*, all of which were solid in their own way. However, from a technical point of view alone, none could compete with Sun-Project's game.

In other words, the PC version is 100% the same as the Amiga game in terms of content – there are no additional levels, no CD audio or any other bonuses. Unfortunately, there are also no passwords, no save option, and no difficulty setting. Which is a shame, because *Turrican II* has always been a really hard game, with lots of regular enemies and some gigantic bosses – more information on this can be found in the Ultimate Guide to *Turrican II* in **RG**152.

But to be honest, the standard enemies are pretty forgettable cannon fodder, and most of the bosses don't have much more to offer than looking quite impressive. Once again, the real danger comes from the environment: The enterprising turricanologist should be prepared for many unexpected falls, sometimes ending up on a saving platform, sometimes in a bottomless pit, various flamethrowers, nasty spike traps, or alien heads grabbing a bite from out of the background. Sooner or later you learn to read the environment well, and the higher colour density of the PC version makes for a slightly better overview – but even in this version, *Turrican II* remains a very challenging game.

This, and the fact that the game design was five year's old at the time of release, were the main reasons why this European-only version received only average reviews. If it got any at all, as there is not a single English review from that time. Things were different in Germany, where it was put under scrutiny in four magazines: The game received 64% in *PC Player*, 63% in *PC Games*, 67% in *PC Joker* and 65% in *Power Play*, where tester Michael Galuschka wrote the following, "It's particularly the great Huelsbeck compositions that show what a great game *Turrican II* was four years ago. But in these modern times it's only old Amiga freaks this conversion really speaks to."

According to Thomas, if the PC version of *Turrican II* had been successful enough, *Turrican III* would have followed. Unfortunately, the conversion only sold about 15,000 copies. Which sounds worse than it actually was. "The development costs were not particularly high, so even with the low sales, the game wasn't a flop," says Thomas. However, it was the end of Sun-Project, no more commercial games would come from the three friends. If you want to play the PC version

» [PC] In the PC version, the oversized bosses in particular show much more detail than ever before.

» [PC] Even the credits animation has been completely redrawn.

» [PC] The spaceship may no longer look quite so sleek, but the nod to *Katakis* is still there.

of *Turrican II* today, you should really do so on an Amiga, even if it sounds paradoxical at first. That's because Amiga developer Sonic Sloth released a port of the DOS game for AGA Amigas in December 2022. "The best way to play the PC version of *Turrican II* is on an Amiga" is the ironic and unexpectedly true motto of this port. Sonic Sloth has combined the best of both worlds: the improved graphics of the DOS version with the option to switch to the original Amiga sprite of the hero. There are also a lot of improvements, such as two additional difficulty levels, an integrated trainer, the option to look down to avoid blind jumps, additional secrets and much more. *Turrican II* is a classic in any of its popular versions, and is close to run-and-gun perfection, thanks to it wonderfully varied and imaginative level design, great graphics and flawless soundtrack.

It's a truly excellent platformer through and through. And the PC version makes all these aspects shine brighter than ever before! Yes, not all of the graphics enhancements are a winner, especially the somewhat odd-looking hero sprite. But that doesn't detract from the high quality of this unexpected conversion, which is all too rarely mentioned in the canon. ✱

» [PC] World 3 consists of three flying levels. With its incredibly fast parallax scrolling, it pushed the technical limits of the PCs of the time.

» [PC] In the original version, one of the flight levels had the slogan "KATAKIS LIVES!" In the PC version, this banner was changed to a hope that unfortunately was never meant to be.

REMASTER MASTERY

Remasters of older games that also improved on the originals

SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS
SNES, 1993

■ 1985's *Super Mario Bros* set the stage for arguably the biggest success story in videogame history, followed by a spin-off and two sequels on the original Famicom/NES platform. All four of these games were revived in *Super Mario All-Stars* on the SNES, with much improved graphics and sound, a save function and numerous bug fixes.

METROID: ZERO MISSION
GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2004

■ Nearly 20 years after the release of the action classic *Metroid*, Nintendo brought a greatly expanded version of the original to the then high-flying Game Boy Advance. *Zero Mission* presented the sprawling world of Planet Zebes with greatly expanded graphics and sound, and added more missions, more action, more story and some all-new levels.

DUCKTALES REMASTERED
VARIOUS, 2013

■ Twenty-four years after the release of the original platform milestone *DuckTales*, Capcom released the official remaster. The game features all the levels from the original, which have been significantly expanded, shows beautiful HD graphics, an excellent soundtrack, much more story and even the voices of the original series' voice actors!

DAY OF THE TENTACLE REMASTERED
VARIOUS, 2016

■ LucasArts' *Day Of The Tentacle*, released in 1993, is regarded as one of the greatest point-and-click adventures of all time. Yet it took a full 23 years for Tim Schafer, one of its original creators, to make an official remaster. This new version features significant graphical enhancements, optional easier controls and a great director's commentary.

NAM-1975

BACK TO THE NIGHTMARE

RETROVIVAL

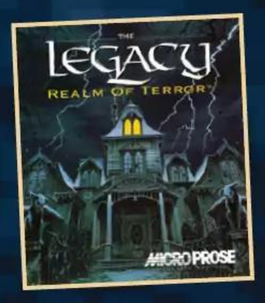
» NEO GEO » 1990 » SNK

Back in 2003, I made a decision – I wanted to buy a Neo Geo AES. That probably sounds crazy, and to some degree it was. I was under no illusions that I'd be able to afford new games like *The King Of Fighters 2003* and *SNK Vs Capcom: SVC Chaos*, but back then it was still possible to pick-up new-old stock copies of certain games quite cheaply. One particular game that seemed easy to acquire was *NAM-1975*, specifically copies intended for regions where the sight of a woman's bare leg on the cover was considered taboo, which had been crudely censored with a marker pen.

NAM-1975 is a shoot-'em-up that accompanied the Neo Geo at launch. As you can probably guess from the title, it's set during the final days of the Vietnam War, but not as it actually happened – at least, not unless there were a whole bunch of weird robot tanks that we just weren't told about. The game plays out in the style of *Cabal*, as one or two players control soldiers who run back and forth along the bottom of the screen, shooting at enemies in the distance. While it rarely receives too much attention today, it's a really solid game that features the standard hallmarks of early Neo Geo software, including lots of sampled speech and a healthy helping of sprite scaling.

I didn't end up buying a Neo Geo console back then, but I did eventually get an arcade Neo Geo MVS board in 2016. The only problem is that the game is no longer cheap on AES or MVS, or even Neo Geo CD, and as much as I'd like to own a copy, I don't fancy paying over £100 for it. Thankfully there's an *Arcade Archives* release on modern platforms, which may not satisfy my love of physical media, but will give me change from a tenner.

THE MAKING OF THE LEGACY: REALM OF TERROR



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** MICROPROSE

» **DEVELOPER:** MAGNETIC SCROLLS AND MICROPROSE UK

» **PLATFORM:** PC

» **RELEASED:** 1993

» **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER

PLATFORM: AMIGA, ATARI ST

RELEASED: 1992

WONDERLAND

PLATFORM: PC, ATARI ST, AMIGA

RELEASED: 1991

FIELDS OF GLORY (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: PC, AMIGA, CD32

RELEASED: 1993

SIMULATOR EXPERTS MICROPROSE AND TEXT ADVENTURE MASTERS MAGNETIC SCROLLS JOINED FORCES ON A TERROR-INSPIRED GRAPHIC ROLE-PLAYING PC GAME PUBLISHED IN THE EARLY NINETIES. WITH RENDERED MONSTERS, RPG TROPES GALORE AND A STRONG LOVECRAFTIAN VIBE, PREPARE TO EXPERIENCE THE HORRORS WITHIN THE LEGACY...

Words By Richard C Hewison

The commercial viability of text adventures, with or without location graphics was at a low point in the early Nineties.

Magnetic Scrolls owned a huge slice of that increasingly niche pie, but its last text adventure releases with publisher Virgin Games in 1992 only reinforced the need for change. It needed to branch out and expand its expertise, as programmer and cofounder of Magnetic Scrolls Ken Gordon remembers. "Servan Keondjian and I think Richard Huddy had written some interesting 3D demos, and we had kicked about some code that threw textured triangles really fast, and that was the beginning of the idea of doing a first-person perspective style game."

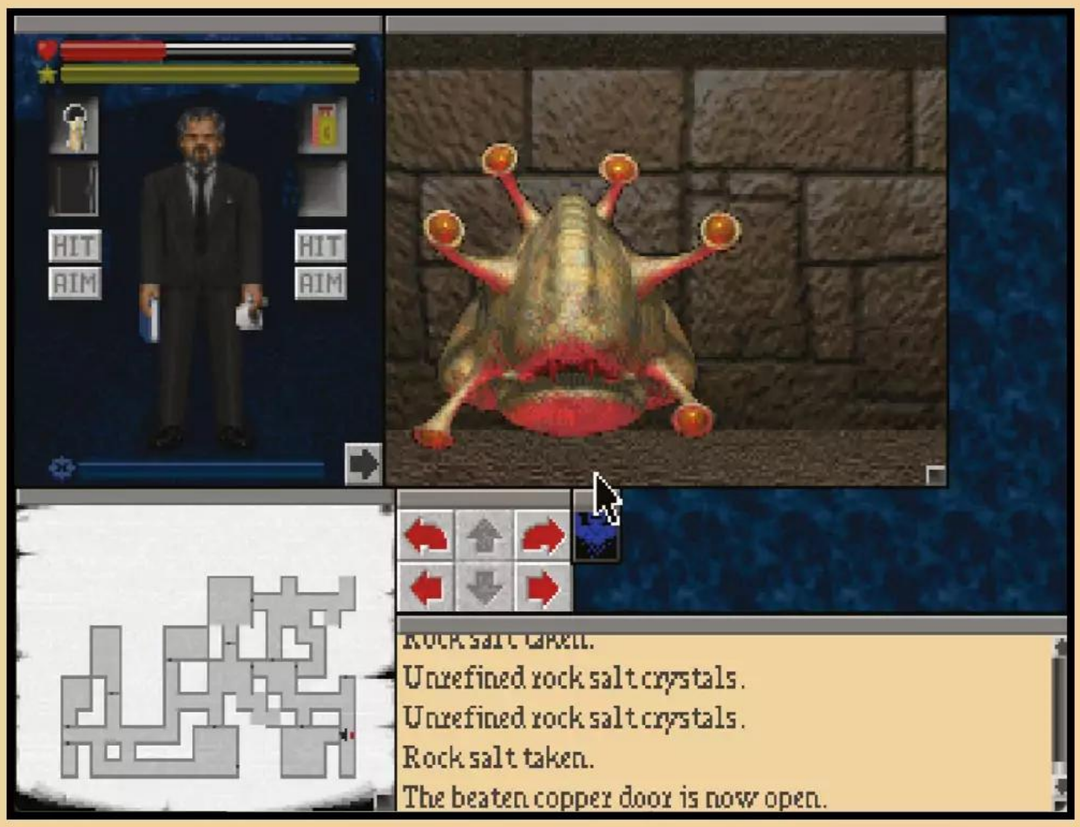
Magnetic Scrolls touted the technology to various publishers, including some familiar faces who had been at its first publisher, Rainbird Software, and who were now at the UK branch of North American publisher MicroProse. Initially a military simulation and strategy publisher, MicroProse had begun to diversify its product range into arcade, adventure, and RPG titles. A successful and sizeable internal development team was being formed in the countryside surroundings of Tetbury in Gloucestershire, and the Magnetic Windows system that had worked so well in Virgin Games' *Wonderland* and *The Magnetic Scrolls Collection, Volume 1* integrated with the new 3D code presented the publisher with an engine in need of a game design.

Thanks to the rapid increase in internal development, MicroProse UK also had a pressing need for more project managers, as Jon Oldham recalls. "I had been a builder and

> "A LOT OF THE DECISIONS WERE MADE IN THE DARK HOURS OF THE NIGHT"
> **Jon Oldham**

HIT
AIM
HIT
AIM
The beaten copper door is now open.
The triangle gives you a pleasant feeling of security.
A sheet of beaten copper blocks this doorway.
The beaten copper door is now open.

» [PC] Who would be able to go to sleep in this spooky mansion?



» [PC] Encountering a six-eyed monster is not for the faint-hearted!

Mapping For Amateurs

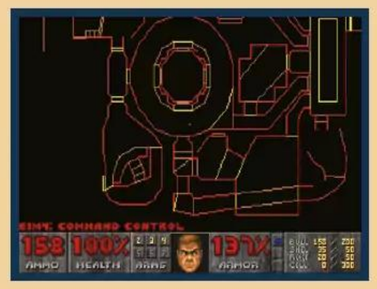
IF CARTOGRAPHY ISN'T YOUR BAG, LET THESE GAMES TAKE THE STRAIN

Legend Of The Sword

■ Silicon Soft's illustrated text adventure for the PC, Amiga and Atari ST included/displayed a map either in a windowed area or in full screen. Not originally part of the game, the mapping system was added at the suggestion of the publisher, Rainbird Software.

Doom

■ Pressing Tab revealed the map in id Software's *Doom*, showing walls and other features as colour-coded lines. Only things viewed by the player within the first-person perspective were drawn, and the player could mark areas of importance if they wished.



Lands Of Lore: The Throne Of Chaos

■ Westwood Studios added a self-mapping system to its RPG *Lands Of Lore* series, showing important features on the map as they were encountered in the adventure. This included stairs, floor plates, teleporters, pits, buttons, levers, chests, doors, secret walls and character and location names. Very handy!

Zork Zero

■ This *Zork* prequel was Infocom's first text adventure to include an in-built mapping system, showing locations as individual boxes on an interactive map. Assuming there were no obstacles, the player could click on the visited locations to move around, which was a nice addition that eased exploration.

Ken Gordon

■ Ken updated the Magnetic Windows system and mentored the other programmers. After *The Legacy*, he switched industries and developed for film editing, medical, financial and cloud applications.

Jon Oldham

■ After managing *The Legacy*, Jon continued his career at Zed Two, DID, Ocean Software, Hotgen Studios and Team17 before returning to project management within the construction industry.

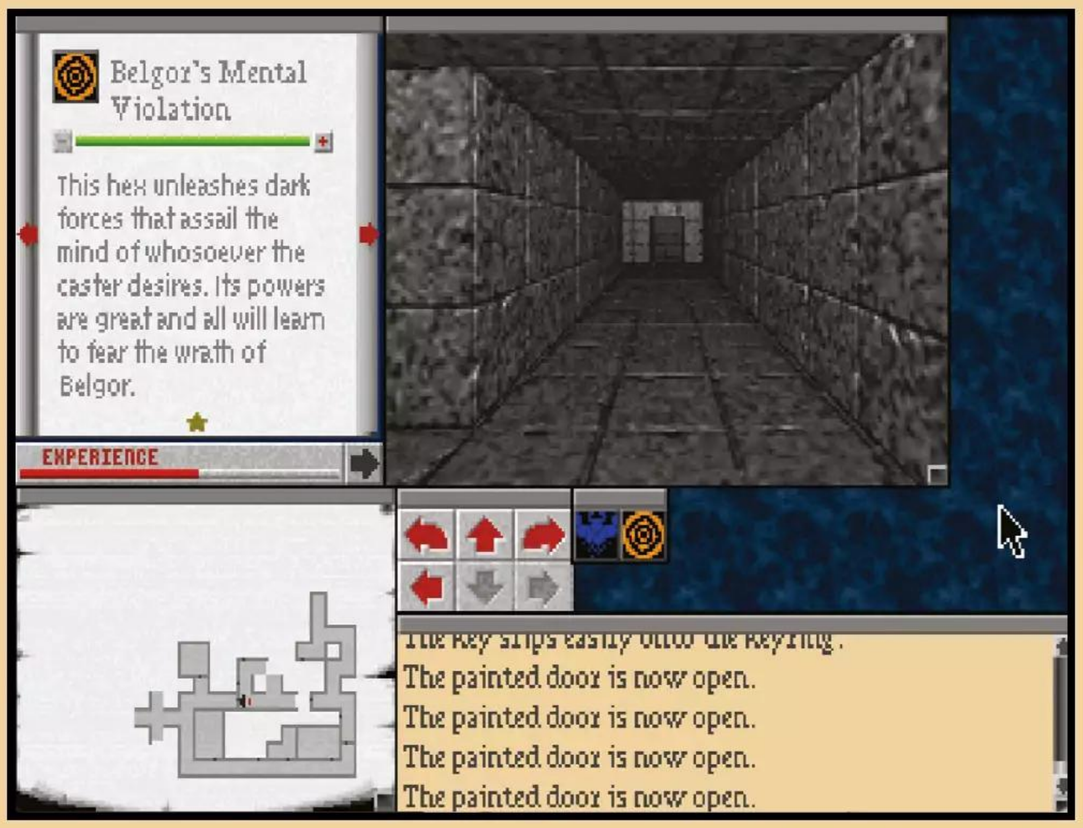
had my own construction project management company and was looking for a new challenge. I saw an advert from MicroProse back in 1991, applied and bizarrely got the job. For some reason, Tim Roberts didn't want anybody who had any previous experience in the games industry, which was lucky for me."

The projects that Jon had to manage at MicroProse were diverse. Firstly, he had the Amiga AGA conversion of the IBM PC helicopter simulator *Gunship 2000*, followed by the Napoleonic historical wargame *Fields Of Glory* for PC and Amiga AGA, and then *The Legacy: Realms Of Terror*. The latter two titles were game designs by Jim Bambra. Jim had a wealth of experience in tabletop RPGs, designing various official *D&D* modules, a *Fighting Fantasy* book, *Warhammer* and other iconic wargame and RPG franchises during the Eighties and Nineties. He had also collaborated with Stephen Hand in the past on various projects including a *Fighting Fantasy* game book.

MicroProse saw the opportunity to get Jim and Stephen to work on a game design that utilised the system Magnetic Scrolls had presented, and what was proposed was unique for that time, being an RPG with a strong HP Lovecraft vibe, running in MS-DOS with an interface that could be customised with various resizable windows, showing rendered locations, items, furniture and creatures all set within the confines of a spooky mansion. "Stephen Hand did lots of level design work, whereas Jim Bambra was more in charge on the more high-level design side of things," recalls Ken.

From the start, the player could explore a fair percentage of the ground floor of the Gothic mansion. However, some doors would need keys before they could be opened, and the limited number of items the player could initially carry in their hands meant that hard decisions had to be made early into the game if they were to survive. It didn't take long before 3D rendered wandering zombies appeared, quickly overwhelming the player. "You didn't have to just stay on the first level. You could go down to the basement, or up to the higher floors but you would likely die if you went straight there," explains Jon. "There was no easy time, no learning curve. The first monster that attacked lost you about 30% of your health points. In hindsight, that probably wasn't a very good idea!"

Players could choose from male or female characters at the start, influenced by their various RPG stats, and some even had magical knowledge thanks to an interest in the occult and the dark arts. ▶


Belgor's Mental Violation
This hex unleashes dark forces that assail the mind of whosoever the caster desires. Its powers are great and all will learn to fear the wrath of Belgor.
EXPERIENCE
The painted door is now open.
The painted door is now open.
The painted door is now open.
The painted door is now open.

» [PC] Getting caught halfway down this corridor would be bad for your health,

» [PC] If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again!

Surviving The Legacy

HOW TO LAST LONG ENOUGH ON LEVEL 1 TO TELL THE TALE

Need A Hand?

■ As quickly as you can, explore the far end of the mansion's ground floor. Appropriately in a dead-end area you will find the creepy Juju Fetish, a dismembered forearm that single-handedly prevents the wandering zombies from attacking you, unless you attack them first.

The Zombie Dodge

■ Sometimes you have to strike out at zombies in order to clear yourself a pathway while exploring. Fortunately, these dense undead aren't very adept at opening doors, so hit one quickly four or five times then fake a dodge in one direction and dash back to the door, open it and go inside.

Trap Door Flaws

■ One particular room has not one, but two trap doors in the floor that you need to be mindful of. To be able to reach the chipped key found in this location, you need to press the two buttons that are by the door into the room. Do that and both of the trap doors will then disappear leaving you to progress in safety.

Portrait Puzzle

■ The Warlock portrait in the Mansion hallway needs a green gem from the second level. Grab the gem and then you can place it into the hole in the painting on the Warlock's necklace. Once you've done that, a hidden door will be revealed. What is behind the secret door? That would be telling!

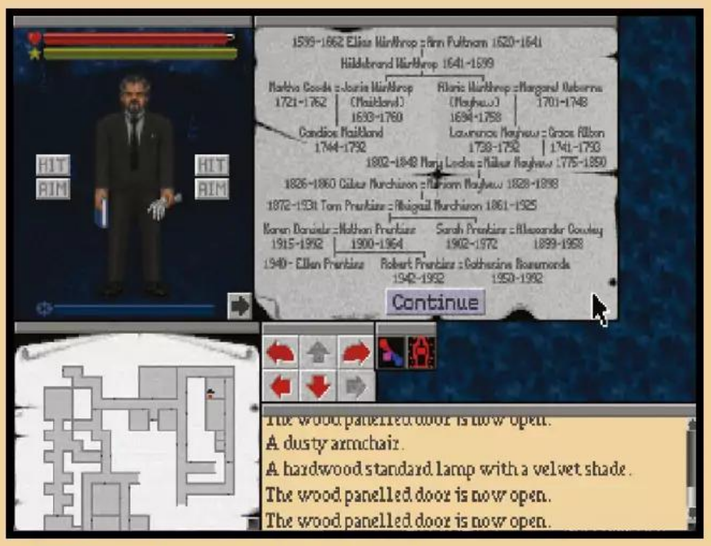
▶ With the dark, Gothic horror vibe prevalent throughout the game design, it was important that the rendered location graphics, items and monsters matched the mood. "Because it was a horror game, it needed to be scary. The texture of the game was designed to make the player nervous and prepared to be frightened," Ken says.

Scaring players was a given, although that was a hard emotion to evoke, mostly due to the limitations of the hardware. Only a few games had tried in the past, with limited success. However, PC graphic and sound cards were on the cusp of providing a more encompassing experience and it was vital that they were used to their full potential to provide a frightening experience.

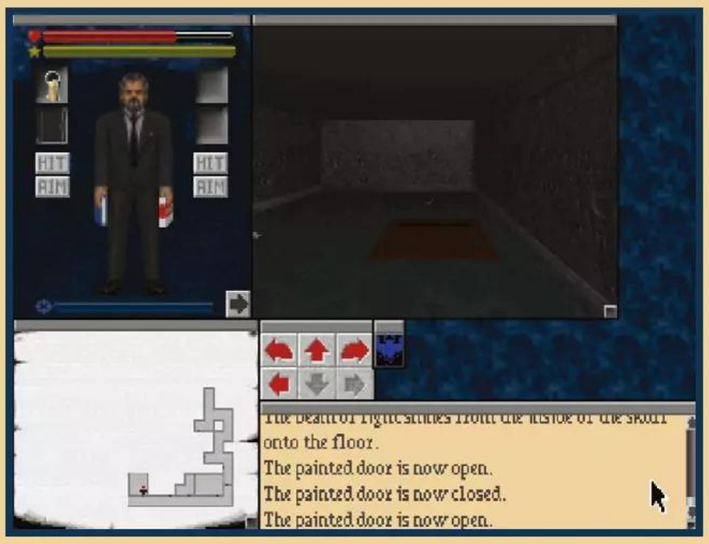
Another key gameplay element was the character's reaction to seeing some of the creatures for the first time. Recoiling with horror influenced what the player could get the character to do until they recovered in-game from the shock. "The design principle behind *The Legacy* was realism," confirms Jon. To help give the game a bigger chance of success, a team of developers within MicroProse were also on hand to help craft *The Legacy*, including Matt Innes, who had only recently joined. He did more programming than anyone else from the publisher's side.

Other contributors included Neil McGrath and Andrew Walrond also on programming, Nick Cook provided the 3D models and animations, and Kevin Ayre was on hand with the character and object graphics. "It was a very intense team really," says Jon. "And in terms of the programming, it was very much a split team. The art was supplied separately. A lot of the decisions were made in the dark hours of the night."

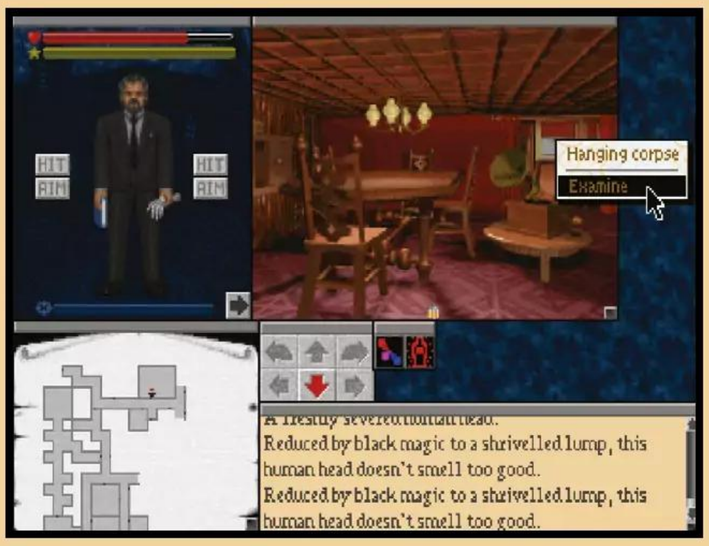
Sound was also a key element, and Andrew Parton and Paul Tonge helped add the vital atmosphere-inducing sound effects. Whilst most of the additional developers were based within MicroProse, Ken Gordon had to move to Tetbury, living there for well over a year whilst working on the game. Unfortunately, other events were plotting to conspire against them. About half-way



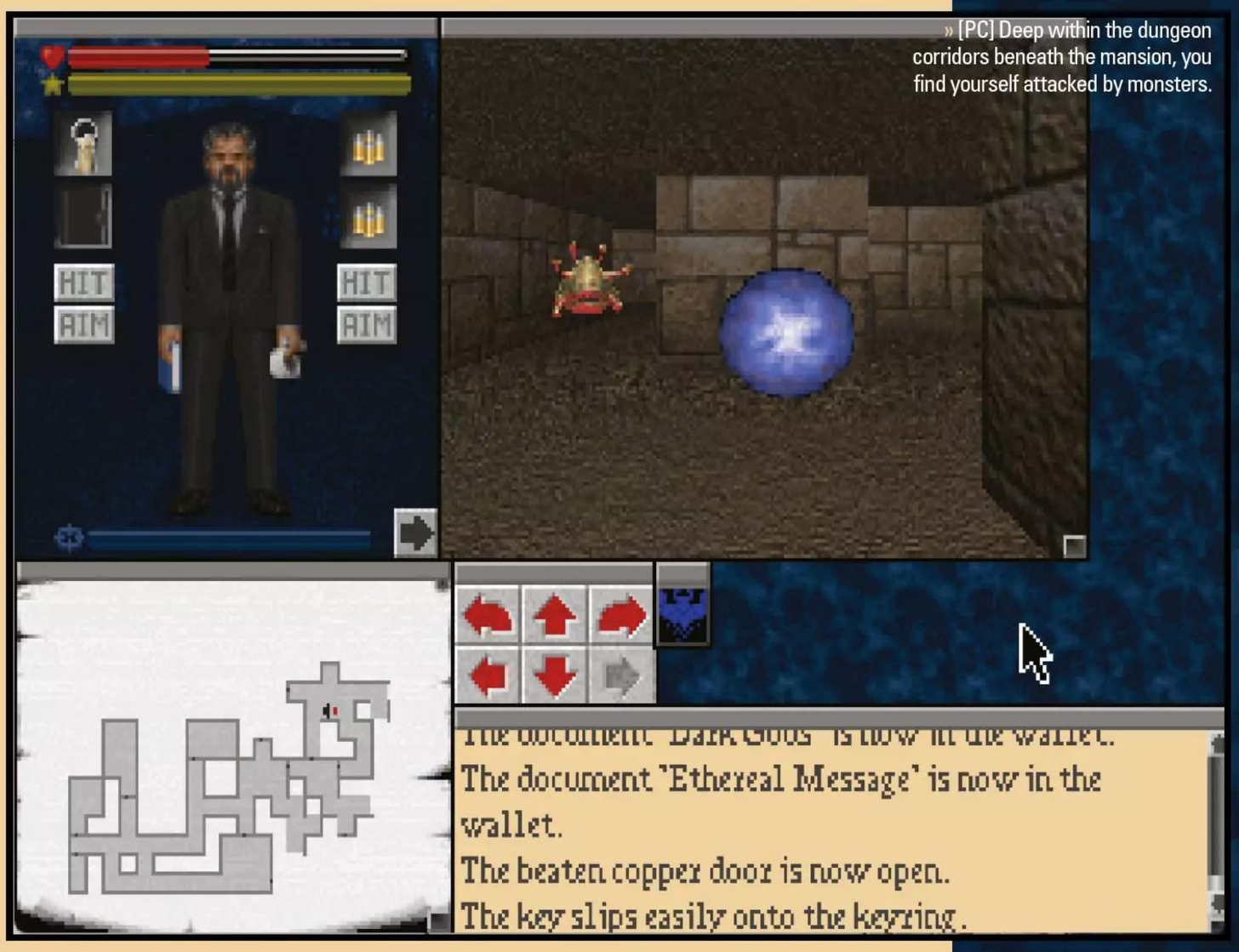
» [PC] There's almost four hundred years' worth of ancestry invested in this mansion.



» [PC] You have to be very wary of where you are stepping in the dark.


HIT
AIM
Hanging corpse
Examine
Reduced by black magic to a shrivelled lump, this human head doesn't smell too good.
Reduced by black magic to a shrivelled lump, this human head doesn't smell too good.

» [PC] If you want to survive then don't hang around too long!


HIT
AIM
The document 'Dark Gods' is now in the wallet.
The document 'Ethereal Message' is now in the wallet.
The beaten copper door is now open.
The key slips easily onto the keyring.

» [PC] Deep within the dungeon corridors beneath the mansion, you find yourself attacked by monsters.

through development, a game was previewed which was a game-changer when Blue Sky Productions showed off *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss*. "As soon as we found out what *Ultima* was doing, it felt like we were dead," admits Jon. "We just needed to get it finished."

The texture-mapped 3D world used in *Ultima Underworld* was groundbreaking but needed a powerful top-end PC. Thankfully, *The Legacy* had more modest requirements, but it did start to look a little antiquated in comparison. However, that wasn't the only game that *The Legacy* would be in competition with. An equally cutting-edge PC game was due to launch around the same time. *The 7th Guest* was also set inside a sinister mansion, but even spookier was the opening location which featured a sweeping staircase, with various doors in the hallway leading to wood-panelled rooms, just like *The Legacy*'s. *The 7th Guest* was one of the earliest CD-ROM-only games to hit the market, choc-a-bloc with fully rendered scenes and full-motion video featuring actors. That game was about solving macabre logic puzzles rather than being an RPG, but the similarities were still striking.

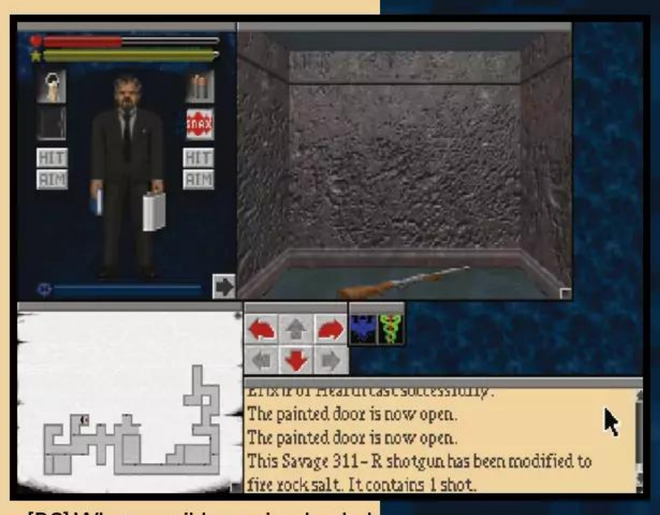
As had been the case for other recent MicroProse titles, an Amiga AGA conversion was also part of the contract. Whilst the Magnetic Windows system had been successfully used in previous Amiga games, the real challenge was the speed of the pseudo-3D environment, and the amount of memory and storage space the graphics needed. "Matt did a lot of work on the Amiga version that never saw the light of day," explains Ken. "Towards the end, MicroProse started getting into difficulty and they got rid of a load of people including Matt, so I hired him to finish it up."

> "THE TEXTURE OF THE GAME WAS DESIGNED TO MAKE THE PLAYER NERVOUS AND PREPARED TO BE FRIGHTENED"
> **Ken Gordon**

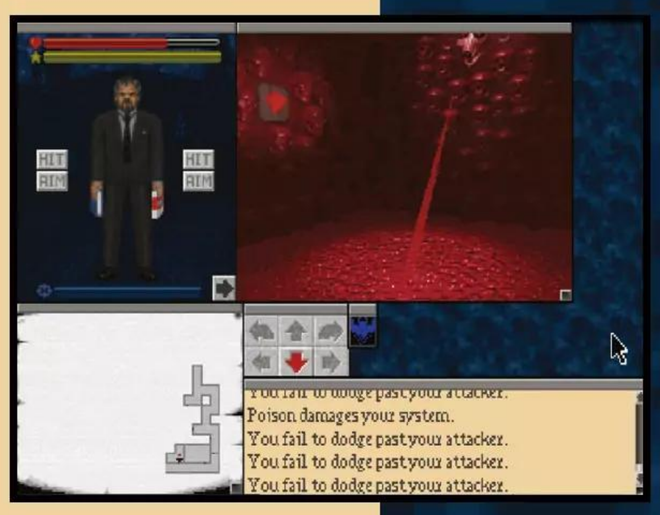
With MicroProse going through huge changes, the obligation to complete the Amiga conversion petered out. With others back in London having moved on to new challenges, it also marked the end of Magnetic Scrolls, the development company that Ken had formed with Anita Sinclair and Hugh Steers a decade earlier. MicroProse continued for a while longer under new ownership, and some of its remaining in-house flight simulator projects were finished, but it was never the same again.

After leaving MicroProse, Jon went on to a long and successful career in games publishing before moving back into the construction industry decades later. Jon reflects on *The Legacy* as a valuable learning experience. "At the time, I had no idea who was a good programmer or not," admits Jon. "But Ken was very good. I mean, he carried most of the project on his shoulders."

Ken left the games industry but remained in software development for several different industries, and he looks back at his time with a different perspective. "You can't really compare what we were doing back then to what's being done now. At Magnetic Scrolls, we mostly did interactive fiction, whilst today's games are like interactive movies." ✱


HIT
AIM
The painted door is now open.
The painted door is now open.
This Savage 311-R shotgun has been modified to fire rock salt. It contains 1 shot.

» [PC] What possible use is a loaded shotgun that only shoots rock salt?


HIT
AIM
Poison damages your system.
You fail to dodge past your attacker.
You fail to dodge past your attacker.
You fail to dodge past your attacker.

Peripheral Vision

Mobile Adapter GB

» **PLATFORM:** Game Boy Color/Game Boy Advance » **YEAR:** 2001
» **COST:** ¥5,800 (launch), £40+ (today, boxed), £20+ (today, unboxed)

The whole world seemed to be going crazy for online connectivity at the turn of the millennium, and Nintendo wasn't going to allow its enormously popular handheld consoles to be left behind. The Mobile Adapter GB allows for various models of Japanese mobile phones to connect to the link cable ports of compatible Game Boy models, with a bundled cartridge called Mobile Trainer used to configure the connection. Compatible games could then use the phone to access online multiplayer modes, leaderboards, downloadable content and more.

By the end of March 2001, IGN reported via Nikkei that just 80,000 Mobile Adapter GB units had been sold since January, noting that the young audience of flagship game *Pokémon Crystal* didn't generally have access to mobile phones. Online functions weren't free either, with prices ranging from ¥10 for a Pokémon trade to ¥30 for a *Game Boy Wars 3* DLC map, plus connection fees. Despite support in games like *Mario Kart: Super Circuit* and a price cut to ¥3,800 in July 2001, the Mobile Adapter GB never became popular and online services were terminated in December 2002. ✱

ESSENTIAL GAME
POKÉMON CRYSTAL

Let's be clear – since the Mobile System GB services are long gone, and it relies on obsolete phones designed for Japanese networks, the Mobile Adapter GB is a collector's curio today. However, the enhanced counterpart to *Pokémon Gold* and *Silver* was the big draw for the peripheral in its prime. Players from across Japan could battle and trade with one another, and there was even a special event in which players could obtain a GS Ball in order to summon Celebi, a rare Pokémon that was unobtainable by other means.

Mobile Adapter GB fact

■ Different coloured cables supported different phone connectivity standards – blue used PDC at 9.6kbps, yellow used cdmaOne at 14.4kbps and red used a PHS at 32kbps.

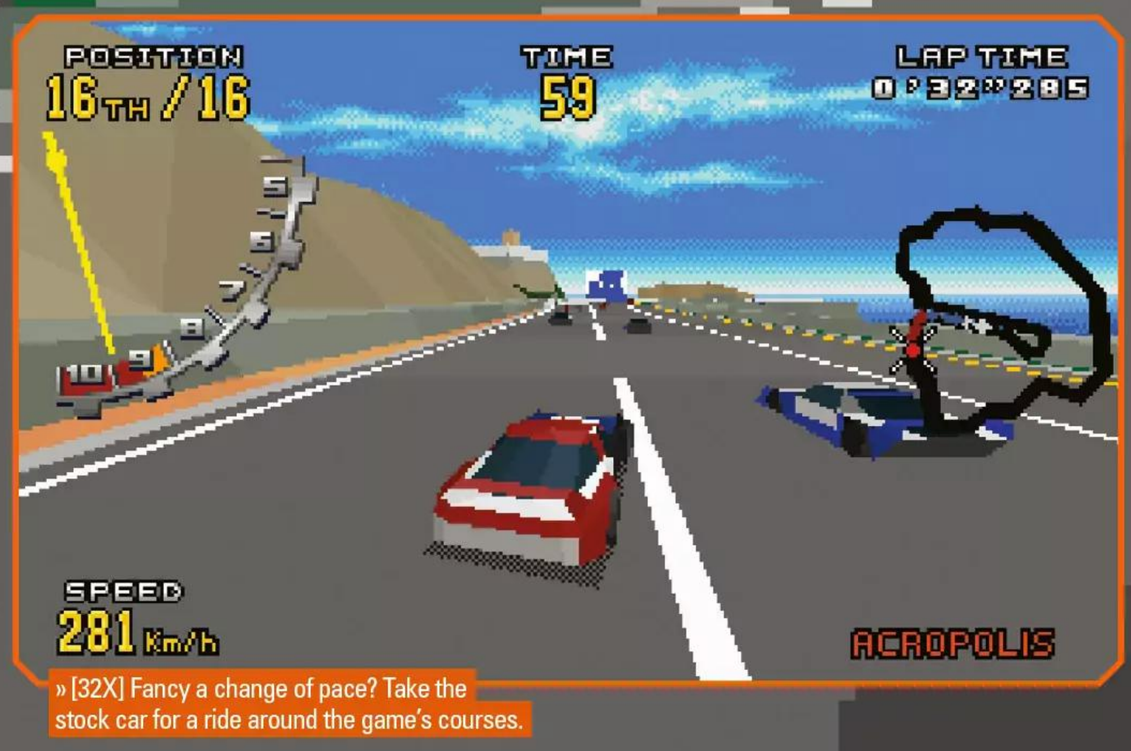
Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

32X GAMES

Sega's mushroom-shaped add-on for the Mega Drive gave it a performance boost in 1994, but it was caught between 16- and 32-bit console generations and flopped commercially. Its library is small, but well worth exploring

Words by Mike Diver



» [32X] Fancy a change of pace? Take the stock car for a ride around the game's courses.

SPEED 252 Km/h

VIRTUA RACING DELUXE

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA CS4** ■ YEAR: **1994**

» [32X] There are numerous viewpoints, including the excellent cockpit view.

■ **Compared to the other two 32X launch titles, *Doom* and *Star Wars Arcade*, *Virtua Racing Deluxe* doesn't feel like a downgrade from what came before it, even though it's certainly not the same silky-smooth racer that launched Sega's Model 1 arcade board.** Perhaps that impression is born of the Mega Drive version having released a few months earlier, powered by the Sega Virtua Processor – because as fantastic as that 16-bit achievement was, *Deluxe* blows it away at the starting grid.

With three cars to select from, five circuits and a variety of gameplay modes including split-screen two-player, *Virtua Racing Deluxe* was, at the time, the very best way to enjoy Sega's racer at home. More cars and tracks would feature in the Saturn's Time Warner-produced version of 1995, but it's the 32X game that's aged the most gracefully, having a clearer connection to the coin-op original and playing with an instant-click purity that only the greatest arcade racers can deliver.

Of the three rides in *Deluxe*, the F1 model is inarguably the classic choice, but anyone feeling their way into the game should opt for the NASCAR-style stock car option, which handles the easiest around demanding bends. The prototype car, on the other hand, is all about speed, but you'll need to be exceptionally familiar with the track layouts to get the best out of it. The arcade game's Big Forest, Bay Bridge and Acropolis circuits are present and correct here, albeit with reduced collision detection in the environments to keep the framerate at a sensible 20fps. (Which is to say if you drive straight through a tree, that's a feature, not a bug.) New to *Virtua Racing* are the Highland and Sand Park tracks – the former combining right-angled street racing with mountain roads and the latter a winding streak of tarmac cutting through a desert-like landscape.

Whatever track you select, there are the traditional four views to pick from – high above, a chase cam, one rather lower to

the road, and one right behind the wheel. And while coming first is the ultimate aim, staying ahead of the ticking clock by passing checkpoints is the only way to reach the finish line at all.

There aren't too many games in the 32X library that'd get much play today, if released for modern systems, but *Virtua Racing Deluxe* would be a terrific companion for the Sega Ages version that released for Switch in 2019. To have this collection with that HD crispness (and 60fps performance, leaderboards and online functionality) would be a treat. Indeed, Sega Ages developers M2 had initially considered converting *Deluxe*, so perhaps that could yet happen someday.

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

DAYTONA USA

ARCADE, 1994

■ The second racer from Sega's AM2 division, *Daytona USA* built on *Virtua Racing* with texture-mapped polygons and improved drifting, threw in a glorious soundtrack and immediately became an arcade classic. Playable on several home systems (the PS3 version is shown here) over the years, including a few Saturn versions, its appeal has never really waned.

HOTSHOT RACING

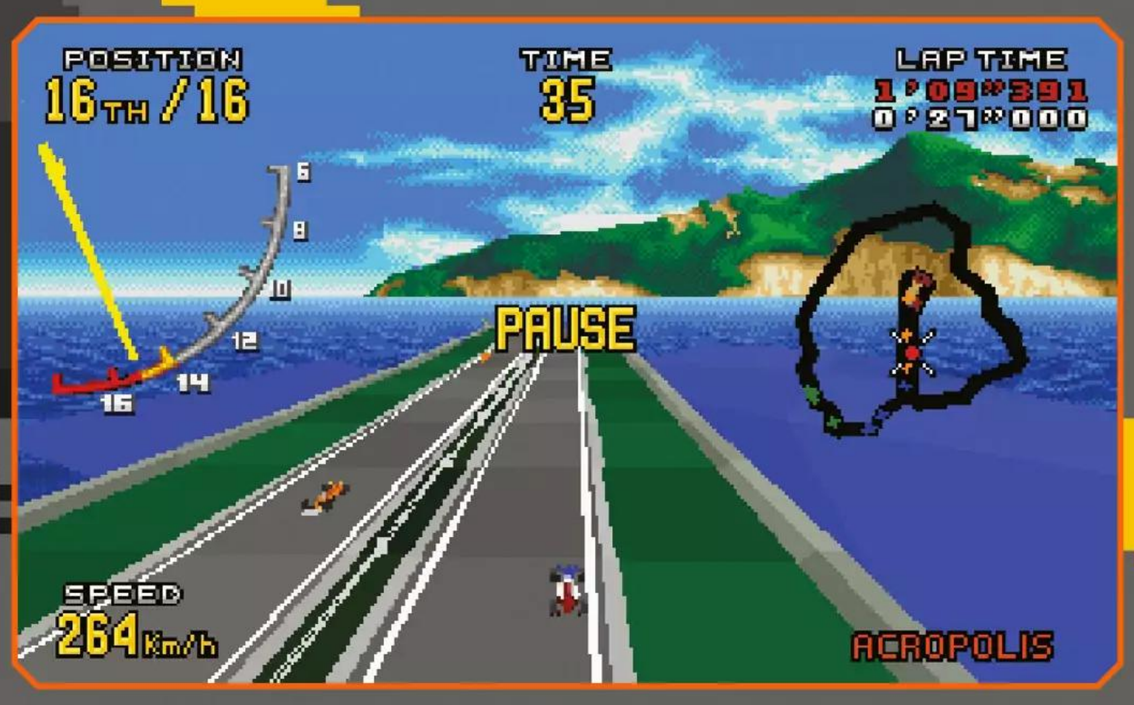
VARIOUS, 2020

■ Sumo Digital's retro-styled racer offers several drivers to pick from, cars to modify with bodywork components and colour schemes, and most importantly a delightful variety of imaginative, blue sky-crowned tracks from coastal cruises to dinosaur park pursuits. It's fantastic fun and highlights Sumo's skill withing the genre.

HOT WHEELS UNLEASHED 2: TURBOCHARGED

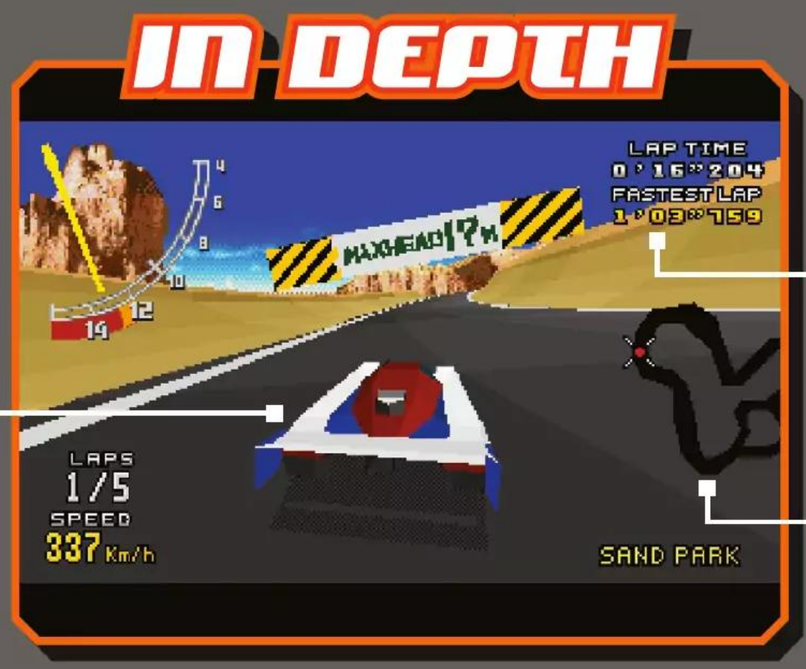
VARIOUS, 2023

■ The toy brand translates perfectly to explosively paced and powered-up arcade racing, with *Unleashed 2* mixing creative track designs with a collect-them-all itchiness that's hard to resist. Races can be extremely chaotic as mismatched vehicles go up against each other.



HIGHLAND

IN DEPTH



QUADRUPLE VISION

■ Just like the arcade original, four distinct camera options are available, from high in the sky to a behind-the-wheel view.

HANDLE THIS

■ While the gameplay is more about arcade immediacy than real-world accuracy, the three cars all handle very differently.

CLOCK WATCHING

■ Reaching the chequered flag before your rivals is the goal – but if the timer reaches zero it's game over.

TRICKY TURNS

■ Watch the track map for upcoming corners as veering off the asphalt can massively slow you down, or worse.

Minority Report

DOOM

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA OF AMERICA** ■ YEAR: **1994**

■ **While rushed and resultingly compromised in several areas – levels in the id Software-developed PC original are missing here, select enemies are absent, the music is a mess and the screen size is reduced to keep performance at around 15-20 frames per second – *Doom* on 32X is still a terrific shooter.** It's not the best version of *Doom* you can play – but assessed within the 32X and Mega Drive library, it's a blast of demon-stomping, secrets-hunting fun.

You can come at *Doom* two ways. The first is at speed, aiming to complete each level in the fastest time possible. But if you take a moment to open your automap, you'll see the environment spreading out, hinting at hidden doors and power-ups waiting to be discovered. This second, exploration-focussed way to play can shape your Doomguy into an ultimate badass, armed to the teeth and ready to crush any Cacodemon who floats in his general direction.

Had *Doom* not been developed at a breakneck pace to make the 32X's 1994 launch, maybe fewer concessions would have been made. It might have been spared the occasional weird glitch and had its full array of enemies included. But even in this stripped-back and slightly malformed guise, it's still *Doom* – and *Doom* rocks.

» [32X] Few first-person shooters have guns as satisfying to use as *Doom*'s shotgun.

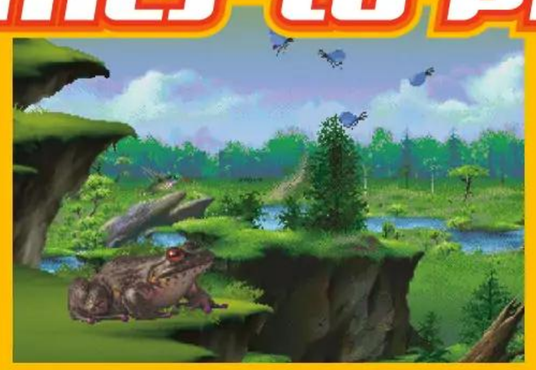
» [32X] The playing area may be cramped, but this is still a solid rendition of id Software's masterpiece.

MORE GAMES TO PLAY

» TEMPO

■ DEV: **SEGA CS3/RED COMPANY**
■ YEAR: **1995**

■ **With no mainline *Sonic* title on 32X** – *Knuckles' Chaotix* sits firmly in the spin-off category – it's *Tempo* that serves as the system's most appealing traditional platformer. Visually vivid (to the extent where you may develop a headache) and pleasingly sprawling of level design, with teleporters zapping you to new areas, what it lacks in originality it makes up for in presentation.



» KOLIBRI

■ DEV: **NOVOTRADE INTERNATIONAL**
■ YEAR: **1995**

■ **Of all the 32X's exclusive games, *Kolibri* is the strangest elevator pitch to have received a green light.** It's a multi-directional shooter from the makers of *Ecco The Dolphin* where you play as a hummingbird, saving Earth from an evil alien crystal. There are light puzzle elements, and various weapons to blast away enemy creepy crawlies. It's bizarre, but undeniably unique.

» DARXIDE

■ DEV: **FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS**
■ YEAR: **1996**

■ **A European exclusive co-designed by *Elite* mastermind David Braben, *Darxide*'s texture-mapped visuals really do work the 32X hardware.** Taking out (too many) asteroids and (too few) enemies is cathartic stuff, but an imprecise timer involving a looming moon is frustrating. Stylish but lacking substance, this isn't in the same league as *Stellar Assault* and not worth its four-figure asking price.

» METAL HEAD

■ DEV: **SEGA CS4**
■ YEAR: **1995**

■ **With its texture-mapped visuals, *Metal Head* makes a striking first impression.** It's a pretty simple game, pitching your mech into against-the-clock combat across maps full of enemies to blow apart, and its draw distances are awful. But it's easy to click with and fun while it lasts, and some of the voice-over work has tremendous unintentional-comedy appeal.

STELLAR ASSAULT

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA CS3** ■ YEAR: **1995**

■ ***Star Wars Arcade*** **might have been the bigger name, but when it comes to the 32X's space-combat options,** ***Stellar Assault*** **is the better game.** The two share a flat-polygons aesthetic and both involve wiping out enemy fleets – but whereas *Star Wars Arcade* is, mostly, a quick-fix affair, *Stellar Assault* is a deeper and richer experience.

Made by the same Sega team as *Tempo* and *Knuckles Chaotix*, *Stellar Assault* is basic of story – baddies are coming to destroy your planet, so you'd better stop them – but consistently captivating to play through. Picking from one of two ships – Feather 1 is smaller with rapid-fire blasters, Feather 2 less agile but more powerful – you take to the stars to engage enemies ranging from nimble fighters to huge flagships.

If full manual movement isn't your thing, you can select autopilot and play the whole game as a rail shooter. What's more, a two-player mode splits the pilot and gunner responsibilities – excellent fun with a friend, albeit with the constant potential to descend into absolute chaos.

Add in two difficulties, first and third-person viewpoints, colour variations for your ship and enemies, a model viewer and the option to watch a full replay (Trace) of your last session, and you've a wonderfully complete package.

» [32X] It wouldn't be a space shooter without an asteroid field to navigate.

» [32X] You've two ships available, with Feather 2 being a good option if you crave sheer power.

RETRO SUNKER

» MOTHERBASE

■ CRI ■ 1995

■ **This isometric shooter certainly looks fine at first glance, but don't let your eyes fool you.** ***Motherbase*****'s dreadfully slow pace and rather imprecise controls makes it frustrating to play.**

» T-MEK

■ DEV: **BITS CORPORATION**
■ YEAR: **1995**

■ **This conversion of Atari's sit-down arcade game loses some of its appeal when shorn of a chunky cabinet, but it's still a decent 3D combat experience.** Players pilot a hovertank and score points for destroying opponents across a variety of arenas. Its single-player tournament mode will keep you entertained for a while, but the two-player split-screen option is the real draw.

» STAR WARS ARCADE

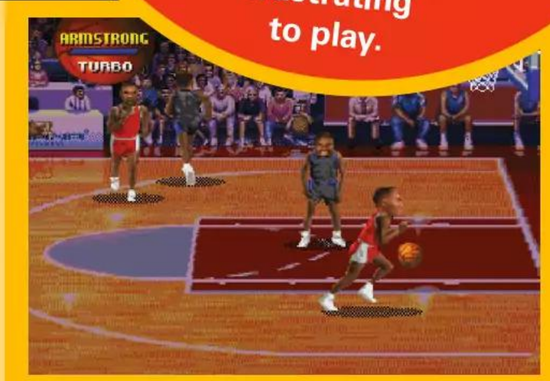
■ DEV: **SEGA INTERACTIVE**
■ YEAR: **1994**

■ **The 32X version of Sega's 1993 arcade hit is a competent conversion unless you start nitpicking.** Both its polygon count and framerate have dropped when compared to the Model 1 original, but these compromises are surely understandable and don't detract from thrilling 3D dogfights accompanied by melodies from the movies and R2-D2's frantic bleeps and screeches.

» VIRTUA FIGHTER

■ DEV: **SEGA CS4**
■ YEAR: **1995**

■ **Considered one of the 32X's greatest achievements, Sega's seminal 3D fighter drops a polygon or two in its translation to the plug-in but retains much that made the arcade original so special.** It has the full roster of eight playable characters, adds a new tournament mode, and even makes use of the 32X's improved audio capabilities. A hit, a very palpable hit.



» NBA JAM: TOURNAMENT EDITION

■ DEV: **IGUANA ENTERTAINMENT**
■ YEAR: **1995**

■ ***NBA Jam TE*** **on 32X doesn't mess with its winning gameplay but does give the experience an immediately noticeable visual update.** Faces are enlarged and recognisable – no more generic heads – and the players scale on the court, appearing larger the closer they are to the camera. It's not quite arcade perfect, but absolutely on fire.

R-Type DX

SHOPPING SHENANIGANS

» GAME BOY COLOR » 1999 » BITS STUDIO/IREM

When we were both at Tesco in the Nineties, my wife Melanie and I always shopped there on a Thursday evening after work. This used to be relatively inexpensive as it was just the two of us, but as Tesco started to move into selling items outside of typical groceries the shopping slowly went up in price – even with our staff discount. We'd typically grab something to add to the shopping and it would usually be a CD or sometimes a film on VHS and later DVD.

As the Tower Park store continued to expand to include TVs and other more expensive items our staff discount shrunk, but it was still worth shopping there, particularly when Tesco started selling videogames. Mel's general rule was that we'd only put stuff in the shopping cart that we could both benefit from, which meant videogames were strictly off the table. That didn't stop me trying though.

Every week when we got to the checkout she'd see I'd tried to sneak a game past her and would take it out. This went on for months until I managed to get a copy of *R-Type DX*. Maybe she genuinely didn't spot it, or maybe I just wore her down, but I got it home and popped it in my Game Boy Color. And what a cracking game it is.

Although I didn't own the original *R-Type* on Game Boy (coded by Jas Austin), I was aware of its quality and had played it numerous times. This new version not only included *R-Type 2* (coded by Bob Pape who did the excellent *R-Type* conversion on the ZX Spectrum) but added colour to both games and introduced *R-Type DX*.

This new game effectively lumps both games into one longer campaign and it's an impressive beast that will require a good amount of skill to beat (something I've admittedly never done). It was a tremendous bargain on release and even though I got very little discount, I simply didn't care. What a pity I never kept it. ✱

HOW ADVERGAMES CONQUERED EUROPE

THROUGHOUT THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES, EUROPE FELL IN LOVE WITH ADVERGAMES AS THEY WERE USED TO SELL ALL KINDS OF PRODUCTS, FROM CIGARETTES TO CHOCOLATE, AS WELL AS POLITICAL PARTIES AND BANKING SERVICES. WHAT WAS GOING ON?

WORDS BY DAMIANO GERLI

At one point or another in our lives, we have all been prey to advertising or marketing, especially at an early age. As with all other media, videogames were not an exception to being used to sell ideas or products. Even in the early Eighties, there were already examples such as *Pepsi Invaders* on the Atari 2600.

Still, while platformers starring corporate mascots quickly became the norm in the Eighties and Nineties, mainland Europe had more of a strange relationship with advergames. They were not only being used to sell every kind of product and service under the sun but were sometimes quite peculiar games to start with. Enter Germany, where advergames reigned supreme between the Nineties and the Noughties.

Professor Björn Blankenheim recalls how the first 'Werbespiele' were developed at the beginning of the Nineties, with advertising budgets on the rise. "After reunification, Germany was the largest market in the whole of Europe. At the same time, game development studios in Germany were going through tough times, there was almost no money left in game production. Being paid upfront for an advergame was an offer they couldn't refuse," he explains.

> "STUDIOS IN GERMANY WERE GOING THROUGH TOUGH TIMES, THERE WAS ALMOST NO MONEY LEFT IN GAME PRODUCTION. BEING PAID UPFRONT FOR AN ADVERGAME WAS AN OFFER THEY COULDN'T REFUSE"
> **PROFESSOR BJÖRN BLANKENHEIM**

But why was the genre so popular? Why did games like the Knorr-licensed *Abenteur Atlantis*, the Toffifee-licensed *Fantasy Forest* and the Eismann-licensed *Eddy & Co exist*? It might be due to the German people being quite frugal. "Germans were very fond of free or very cheap games and advergames were often included as supplements on CDs of very popular games magazines," says Björn. "Sharing these games was also highly encouraged." This business model proved successful, so that in the early Nineties several studios specialised in advergames.

Thanks to these professional production pipelines, releasing an advergame for a reasonable budget was only a matter of a few weeks of work. But it wasn't just commercial advertisers who used the medium. Many contracts came from public institutions, political parties, ministries and even the German armed forces. It is currently unknown how many advergames were released in Germany, such was their popularity. "There are probably between 300 and 400 games, many of them from the first half of the Nineties," continues Björn. "Advergames continued to appear after that, but the first big wave was over."

Indeed, with the popularity of gaming making a comeback, especially on PC, there was a second wave of advergames, starting in 1999. Germany even had its very own corporate mascot that became popular after starring in its own game as Björn explains. "The success of *Mohrhuhn Jagd*, a simple shooting gallery made for Johnnie Walker, was such that advergames got a lot of attention again, but this time around these games were a lot less ambitious."

Still, cross-media was all the rage, so a lot of those games slowly became tie-ins, especially for famous TV shows, while

Professor Björn Blankenheim is a postdoctoral researcher at the University Of Wuppertal. He researches the history of videogames.

Giuseppe Alleva started his work as a developer at Simulmondo in the Nineties, then went to work for Mondadori Multimedia. Today he is an IT dev.

» [PC] The Toffifee logo is quite big and noticeable in the German platformer *Fantasy Forest*.

» [PC] The gnomes are trying to solve this big Toffifee crisis.

Was bringst Du, Bub? Lass sehen.
Es geht die Sage, dass ein goldner Thunfisch das Geheimnis in sich trage, wie uns're arme Heimat von arger Not zu retten sei. Mir

» [PC] *Abenteur Atlantis* starts from the Mesopotamian era and itsplot involves fighting against gods, if you can believe it.

smaller Flash games helped market the new World Wide Web. But, at the beginning of the 21st century, the genre seemed to be slowly dying off. As Bjorn tells it, "With the breakdown of the New Economy, advertising budgets shrunk and the agencies lost interest in costly experiments." With the rising costs of game development in general, the business model was never again as favourable as in the early Nineties. But Germany stands alone as the one country where advergames influenced the industry as a whole, where even famous game developers such as Rainbow Arts (*Turrican*) got in the business, with its *Sunny Shine On The Funny Side Of Life*, an adventure made to promote L&M cigarettes.

In Italy, budgets for advergames were quite small, but, as with Germany, it was a well-known studio that released the first examples in the genre. Simulmondo, founded in 1987, was among the first software houses to be active in the country. It released its first advergames in 1994, commonly considered to be the worst games the software house put out, as they were developed after the studio's heyday when its comic-book adventure games (*Dylan Dog*, *Tex*, *Spider-Man*) had ceased to be a viable business.

But as developer Giuseppe Alleva recalls, that doesn't mean the advergames weren't developed with care and attention. "*Pritt-time* [made to advertise Pritt Stick] was the first advergame we worked on and, to my knowledge, the first released in our country, back in 1994," remembers the developer.

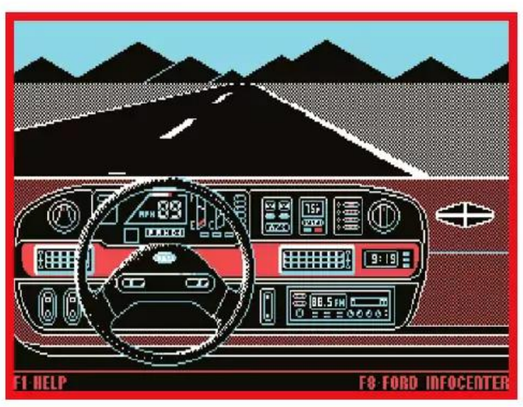
» [PC] We've saved a fair lady with our Monster Mushroom in *Abenteur Atlantis*.

» [PC] The sprites in *Mister Fruit-Joy* are indeed quite impressive for a PC DOS game released in 1995.

» [PC] Picking up candy and various fruits is how you complete levels since Mister Fruit-Joy cannot attack.

THE FORD SIMULATOR SERIES

ADVERGAMES WERE ALSO BIG IN THE US, AS THIS SERIES PROVES

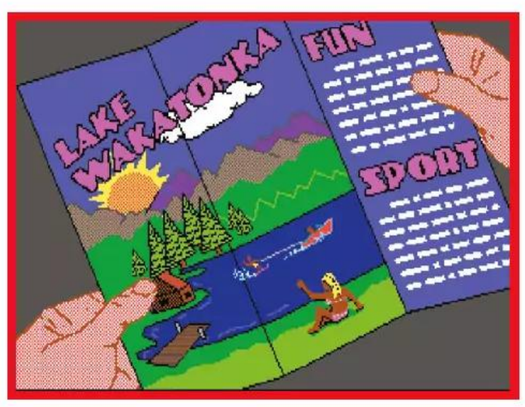


FORD SIMULATOR

■ Developed by The SoftAd group and published in 1987 in computer magazines on a single floppy disk, this original MS-DOS simulator allowed players to try out brand-new Ford cars in a simple driving simulation and even send in a paper pamphlet to ask for more details.

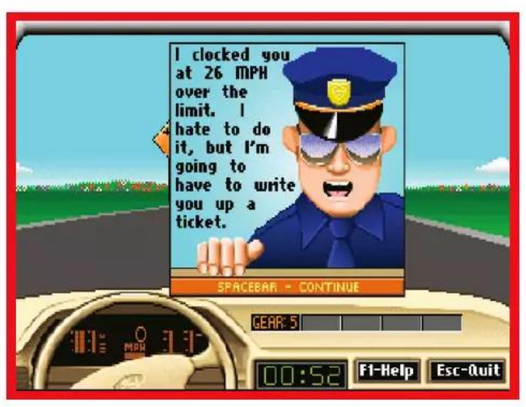
FORD SIMULATOR II

■ In this 1990 sequel to the original, the simulator is much more improved. Along with newer cars, there is a lot more variety in the gameplay allowing the player to take cars out for a drive in the city, while trying to avoid other drivers on the road.



FORD SIMULATOR III

■ Taking more than a little inspiration from the *Test Drive* series, this third chapter in the series allowed players to drive to Lake Tatatonga while trying to avoid meeting with the police. The game even allowed players to order T-shirts featuring Ford's logo.


I clocked you at 26 MPH over the limit. I hate to do it, but I'm going to have to write you up a ticket.
SPACEBAR = CONTINUE
GEAR: 5
00:52
F1-Help
Esc-Quit

FORD SIMULATOR 5.0/6.0

■ This final chapter in the series does not improve drastically over the last game. The objective is still to drive to the lake while avoiding the police and checking out the newer Ford models. There was also a 1996 Windows version with updated menus.

THE WORLD OF ADVERGAMES

GAMES WERE BEING USED ALL OVER THE WORLD TO SELL PRODUCTS. HERE ARE SOME NOTABLE EXAMPLES

MR WIMPY: THE HAMBURGER GAME

Despite the Wimpy chain being a product of the US, its popularity in the UK and Europe in the early Eighties, gave way to this *Burger Time* multi-screen arcade clone published by Ocean for all major computer systems of the time. Be sure to avoid Waldo the burger thief.

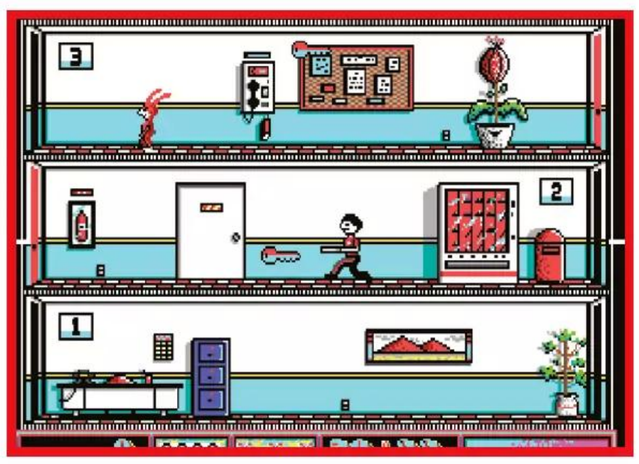
ALL NIGHT NIPPON: SUPER MARIO BROS

Made to promote the Japanese radio program *All Night Nippon*, this retooled version of *Super Mario Bros* (with no two-player mode) was sold on the show via a lottery system. It was published by Nippon Broadcasting System, the company that would also release *Doki Doki Panic*.

COOL SPOT

One of the many classic 16-bit platformers starring a corporate mascot, this 2D side-scrolling game was made to promote the 7Up brand and its mascot, Spot, letting you shoot enemies with soda bubbles. The game received a sequel in 1997, *Cool Spot Goes To Hollywood* also published on Sony Playstation.

AVOID THE NOID



The old Pizza Hut mascot received several games in the late-Eighties, published on platforms as different as DOS and the NES. While the NES game is a classic hard-as-nails Capcom 2D side-scrolling platformer, the DOS game is a vaguely *Paperboy*-inspired single-screen puzzle game.

MCDONALD'S TREASURE LAND ADVENTURE

Behind the corporate façade hides one of the best 2D action platformer experiences of its era, which is just what we'd expect from Treasure. It has smooth gameplay, unique bosses and fun extra features that tie-in with McDonald's products in interesting ways.

> "I GUESS THIS WAS THE NOVEL IDEA, IT WAS AN ADVERGAME SOLD TO PEOPLE WHO HAD ALREADY BOUGHT ENOUGH FRUIT PASTILLES TO LAST THEM A LIFETIME!"
> **GIUSEPPE ALLEVA**

But he doesn't have fond memories of this simple single-screen arcade game, which he describes as a quick two-week job.

Luckily, Giuseppe does have fond memories of *Mister Fruit-Joy*, a 1995 MS-DOS platformer released to advertise Rowntrees' Fruit Pastilles (called Fruit-Joy in Italy). "It was one of the first DOS platform games to scroll as smoothly as an Amiga platformer and featured a full stereo digitised soundtrack, capable of 256 sounds at the same time. The graphical engine was also pretty ambitious, based on the old *Dylan Dog* one used by Simulmondo, but developed in C and Assembler. We had huge sprites in full screen and still, the game used 5% of the engine's potential. It was very fun work for me and my brother, especially since no one else in the software house seemed to have any knowledge on how to program in DOS."

» [PC] The Simulmondo logo pops up again and again in the game, even in the ancient Greek area.

» [PC] *Eddy & Co* is a very cute 2D platformer for ice cream company Eismann, with three playable characters.

The game only featured a few levels, which the developer justifies with a limited budget, and Simulmondo being, by then, on its last leg. Giuseppe continues describing the platformer and mentions how the game was gifted if one had bought enough pastilles. "I guess this was the novel idea, it was an advergame sold to people who had already bought enough Fruit Pastilles to last them a lifetime!" he laughs.

But, despite these couple of exceptions, the budget in Italy for advergames was never so big to be of interest to big companies, there was not a big enough audience to justify companies investing in them. *The Art Of Tennis* was among the few games developed by an actual software house, Prograph, but not even one screenshot has been recovered. Artematica,

» [PC] Seals in Eddy & Co let you jump higher, while jumping on enemies allows you to get rid of them.

» [PC] Get ready to solve a lot of classic adventure game puzzles in *Croustibat*, much like the *Gobliiins* series by Coktel Vision.

or rather, one developer working at the company in 2002, did develop a small sim game called *Lolagame*.

Distributed freely by milk company Granarolo on its website, it was a quirky simulation of being a farmer forced to reach a certain amount of milk every day. Manage your farm, take care of your cows (all with their own names and personalities), and reach your objectives. Developed by Mario Bruscella, the developer calls it "a precursor of *Farmville*" and mentions he did the game in a few days, with Granarolo launching a contest – the player that managed to get the high (milk) score would win a prize. Interestingly, the game reached Blizzard, as Mario recalls, "They were so impressed that I did this game in a few days that they wanted to interview me, unfortunately, I had to pass on the opportunity."

Spain also did not have a lot of funding for advergames, especially because the golden age of developers in Spain came too soon for companies to fund games. One of the rare exceptions is the unique idea behind the 2012 ZX Spectrum game Phantomas en el Museo (*Phantomas In The Museum*). Dedicated to artist Pablo Serrano Aguilar and commissioned by the museum where the game was also playable, it was a unique idea to celebrate the country's long-standing love of 8-bit computers and the work of a famous painter and his wife.

Portugal, interestingly enough, did not have a lot of advergames but one very famous example, only released in Portugal, was developed by a French team, Coktel Vision. *Croustibat* reuses the *Gobliiins* engine, for a short point-and-click adventure game where two young kids have to solve riddles while always having their best weapon at hand: fried fish sticks. It's interesting how many of the puzzles in the game are reflected in the Croustibat television commercials of the time, if you had any knowledge of them, you could more easily solve the game's riddles.

» [PC] Sunny steps in to solve a problem while walking away with a hundred hot dog buns in *Sunny Shine On The Funny Side Of Life*.

Scandinavia also saw a fair share of advergames in the late-Nineties, with a peak in the Noughties, such as the Danish game *Harald Hårdtand: Kampen om de rene tænder* (*Fight Of The Clean Teeth*), a classic arcade game made to promote Colgate toothpaste, while *Pickup Express* was made in 2000 to promote Toyota Cars. A more dubious proposal is *Gang Bang Spillet*, made in 2001 to promote a Danish dating site. The player controls a man who has 20 seconds to get ready, with quick up-and-down keystrokes, before venturing on to explore one of the five rear-ends peaking out of a bed. Select the right ones or you will be beaten up. As for more average proposals, *Villervalla i Uppsala* is a 2004 Swedish game developed for a local insurance company with the player controlling kid superheroes in various situations, trying to avoid accidents in the house or on the road.

Overall, while it is fair to say that the golden age of advergames might be over, it is a genre that will never really go away. As it slowly evolved from the early Eighties arcade games, through the weird adventure games of the Nineties and then on to Flash games of the Noughties, if there is a thing that advergames have shown it is resilience. Still, it makes us a little sad to think we might never see something similar to an advergame like *Captain Gysi und das Raumschiff Bonn* again. Published in 1997, the left-wing party in Germany decided to make popular politician Gregor Gysi the star of his very own *Space Quest*-like point-and-click adventure game. Somehow, at the time, this idea seemed quite reasonable, such was the power of advergames. ✱

» [PC] Sunny is quite happy that he gets to take part in a quiz show where he can get some money to… buy cigarettes?

» [PC] *Sunny Shine On The Funny Side Of Life* actually features a boss key that brings up a fake MS-DOS screen so you can fool anyone watching that you are doing some work.

» [PC] The bosses in *Harald Hårdtand* can be definitely scary, but then again so is a visit to the dentist.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

OLD!
retro GAMER
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES
GOLDEN AXE: THE REVENGE OF ULIKMA ASSESS
THE EVOLUTION OF TAITO SOFT
ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBORS
ASTRO BOT
THE MAKING OF NARC
MASTER SYSTEM GEMS TO COLLECT
ASTRO CITY MINI HANDS-ON

Info

- **System:** PlayStation 5
- **Year:** 2024
- **Publisher:** Sony Computer Entertainment
- **Developer:** Team Asobi
- **Key People:** Nicolas Doucet, Sebastian Brueckner, Kenny Young

Go Deeper

- The *Astro Bot* series began with *AR Bots*, which appeared in The Playroom, a collection of augmented reality minigames that was preinstalled with every PS4.
- Team Asobi considered an open-world structure before settling on a huge variety of levels (the hub still branches out though)

» [PlayStation 5] Look out for hardware and peripherals, including some deep cuts, from PlayStation's history through the game.

After delighting new PS5 owners as an opening act to showcase the console's unique features, Astro Bot was finally ready for prime time as Team Asobi made a fully fledged 3D platformer with polished production values channeling Nintendo magic and PlayStation history

Words by Alan Wen

ASTRO BOT

THE BACKGROUND

You don't really get mascot characters in games anymore. Sure, PlayStation has its share of beloved and iconic characters but these are from more mature and realistic stories, not what you might find turned into a plushy or big cuddly suit on a convention floor. Except for Astro Bot, who kind of stumbled into the role accidentally.

A creation of PlayStation Studios' Tokyo-based Team Asobi, Astro's first proper 'wow' moment was the 2018 PSVR1 platformer *Astro Bot: Rescue Mission*, which garnered acclaim as the best exclusive on Sony's headset. His next outing was in *Astro's Playroom*, a 3D platformer preinstalled with every PlayStation 5 console. Despite being a fairly small game designed primarily to show off the DualSense controller's features, from its immersive audio and haptics to blowing into the built-in mic, it was a hit with critics who were placing it in their end-of-year lists and even comparing it favourably with Mario's 3D games. But would they have said the same if it had been a feature-length game that wasn't a freebie? Its standalone self-titled entry unveiled at State Of Play in May 2024 was then something of a surprise, all the more so after Sony had stated that there would be no new first-party releases that year. Could this throwback platformer made by a team of around 65 people fill the blockbuster void in the calendar and give us a modern mascot hero we all needed?

THE GAME

Running with the jokes that had people comparing the PS5's design to a space ship, it becomes exactly that as Astro and his fellow bots fly through space until they encounter Space Bully Nebulax who attacks and steals the ship's CPU, resulting in the rest of it to break apart, scattering the bots across the galaxy. So it's up to Astro to recover all the ship parts (each based on a PS5 component such as its GPU) and more than 300 of his fellow bots.

Set across six different galaxies, each level is self-contained brimming with its own ideas and

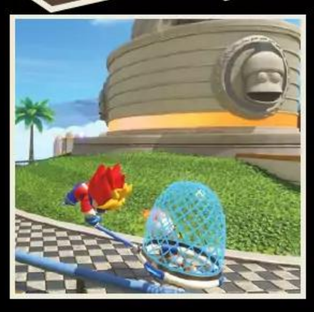
» [PlayStation 5] The DualSense controller doubles as a ship that flies you into each level at the start.

» [PlayStation 5] Besides rescuing hundreds of costumed bots, you can unlock the most iconic ones to wear yourself.

Things of note

HOMAGE RUN

Each world concludes with a homage to a beloved PlayStation franchise. While these include more recent IP, it's the older Japanese-developed ones that delight the most.



PLAYING WITH POWER-UPS

Astro's movesets may seem minimal but a fun selection of power-ups used for specific levels activated with the triggers are responsible for many great setpieces.

BOSSING IT

If there's one thing that *Astro Bot* does better than *Mario* it's the bosses, which still go down after three hits but are executed with a lot more panache.

MEET YOUR HEROES

There are hundreds of bots based on characters from beloved series from across PlayStation history, with brilliant bespoke animations you can unlock for them in the hub.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Astro Bot's DLC includes the delightful Winter Wonder. It's surely the best achievement in gaming festive cheer since *Christmas NiGHTS Into Dreams* debuted.

themes rather than as a cohesive whole, but the appeal means you never really know what you're going to get across *Astro Bot*'s eighty-plus levels. These are some of the most gorgeously detailed environments in any 3D platformer. There's rarely a moment it doesn't find an excuse to have you traversing through leaves, snow, water and baubles, if only to give you a new tactile sensation or delight in making a mess scattering these objects across the room.

Compared to previous outings, this is arguably Astro with his tightest controls. He's easier to move around than Mario but he's also lacking in a similarly varied moveset, his jump including jet boots that allow him to hover in the air and also destroy enemies caught beneath the jets. It's however compensated by one of eight power-ups found in certain levels that transform the gameplay. For instance, a dog strapped to your back is actually a rocket allowing you to boost up and across environments while the Twin-Frog Gloves use both triggers to punch forward and grab bars to swing from. While many of these powers are animal-themed, one standout is the Time Stopper, which slows down very fast-moving levels for a short time, which has a design based on the PSVR1 headset.

These references to PlayStation history is one of the key draws to *Astro Bot* as you're not just rescuing bots, as the majority of them are actually cameos based on characters from game franchises from across PlayStation's 30-year history. That's not just including IP from Sony's own vault, some which also receive their own themed level at the end of each galaxy, but also plenty of third-party franchises whose memorable debuts are intrinsically tied to PlayStation, such as *Resident Evil*, *Metal Gear Solid* and *Tomb Raider* (Square Enix is however the one notable publisher whose IP is completely absent).

» [PlayStation 5] While generally an easy game, shorter optional levels in each world offer more challenging bite-sized platforming.

A cynic might dismiss them as the gaming equivalent of Funko figures but closer inspection reveals the loving care that Team Asobi has put into these appearances. For instance, you can unlock items from a gacha machine minigame that gives your rescued bots a cute bespoke animation that accurately expresses the character and their game. There's also a genuine 'if you know you know' appeal to the cameo designs as none are explicitly named, summarised with a pithy one-liner – let's just say the bot described as "tells the occasional white lie" is quite the understatement.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Platforming purists may argue *Astro Bot* isn't on par with a *Mario* game. But it sure does come close, and one can only imagine Nintendo throwing as many production values and effects into one of the plumber's titles. When other 3D platforming pretenders have fallen so short, Team Asobi's achievements deserve to be celebrated with all the awards it's been sweeping up. Yet there's also the bittersweet feeling that the game is a kind of mausoleum for all the colourful and innovative games that Sony no longer makes, having also shuttered the celebrated Japan Studio back in 2021, Team Asobi being all that's left of that lineage. Let's hope that Astro's next adventure relies less on nostalgia. ✱

ULTIMATE GUIDE

DINO

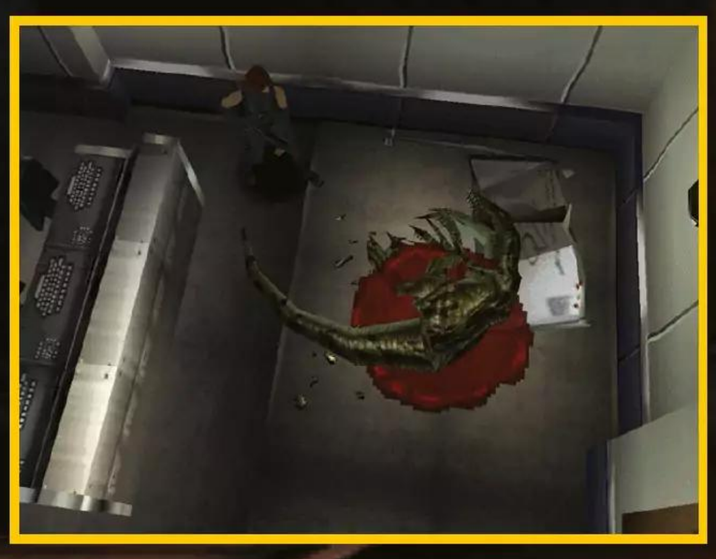
IN 1999, RESIDENT EVIL CREATOR SHINJI MIKAMI SWAPPED GROANING GHOULS FOR RAMPAGING REPTILES AND THE RESULT WAS DINO CRISIS, ANOTHER SURVIVAL HORROR HIT FROM CAPCOM. JOIN RETRO GAMER AS WE DISCOVER WHY THIS FAN FAVOURITE SHOULDN'T BE DISMISSED AS 'RESIDENT EVIL WITH DINOSAURS'

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

"This is just like *that* movie." In a game filled with goofball B-movie dialogue, this knowing line, uttered by operative Rick when it starts raining Raptors, is easily the best – and the most genuine. It's a matter of record that the game's director Shinji Mikami was directly inspired by *Jurassic Park*, but perhaps surprisingly, it was Michael Crichton's original novel rather than Steven Spielberg's adaptation that provided the key influence. Specifically, the scene where Alan Grant and friends visit the Raptor enclosure and witness the creatures hunting in packs. Mikami has commented that, in the novel, the scene is written from the characters' perspective, at eye level, whereas in the movie it's shown from above, a place of relative safety. It was the former approach, and the primordial fear it instilled in Mikami – the fear of being prey – that gave birth to *Dino Crisis*.

"YOU CAN'T JUST LEG IT THROUGH A DOOR LIKE IN RESIDENT EVIL... THE CLEVER BUGGERS FOLLOW YOU"

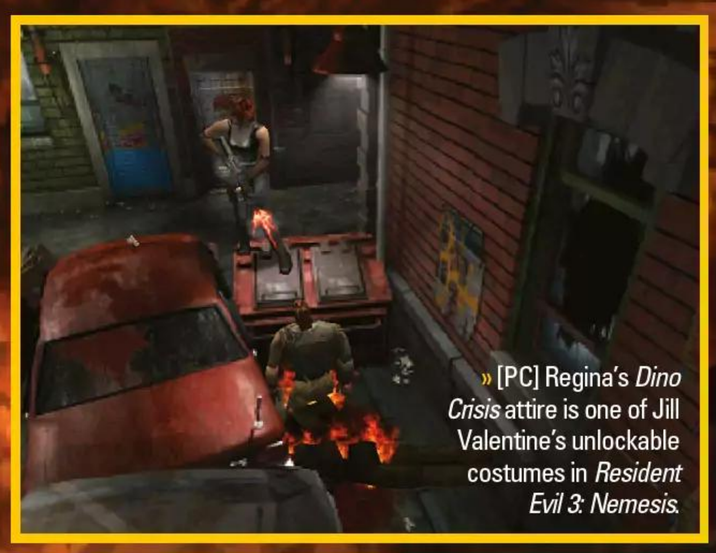
The game follows in the footsteps of his earlier *Resident Evil*, featuring that familiar mix of action, exploration, puzzle solving and inventory faffage. But damn, those Raptors take things up a notch. The setting is a high-tech research facility on the remote Ibis Island and by the time the game starts, Raptors are already roaming the corridors. They're far more formidable than *Resident Evil*'s zombies, chasing you down at speed and killing you with a couple of bites. Worse, the bullets from your standard handgun seem to bounce off their scaly skin, and when you do down them, they jump right back up! Even worse, ▶



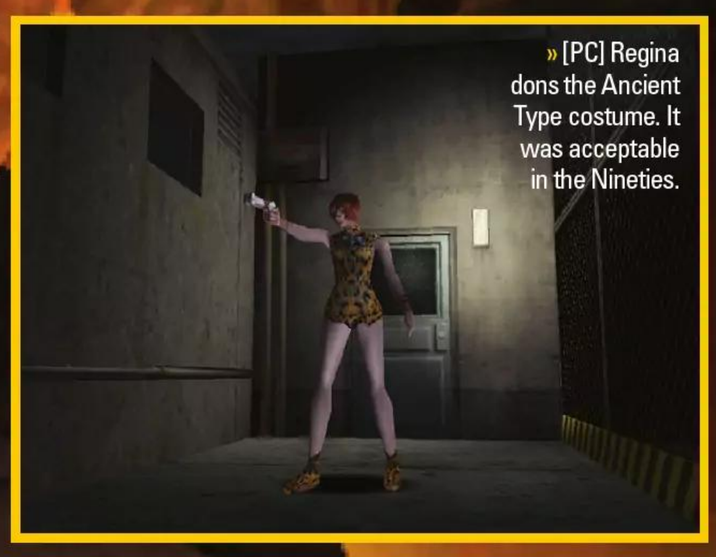
» [PlayStation] Just like *Resident Evil*, your enemy is only truly dead when it bleeds out.

» [PlayStation] Trapping the Raptor inside the poison gas room is a very smart move…

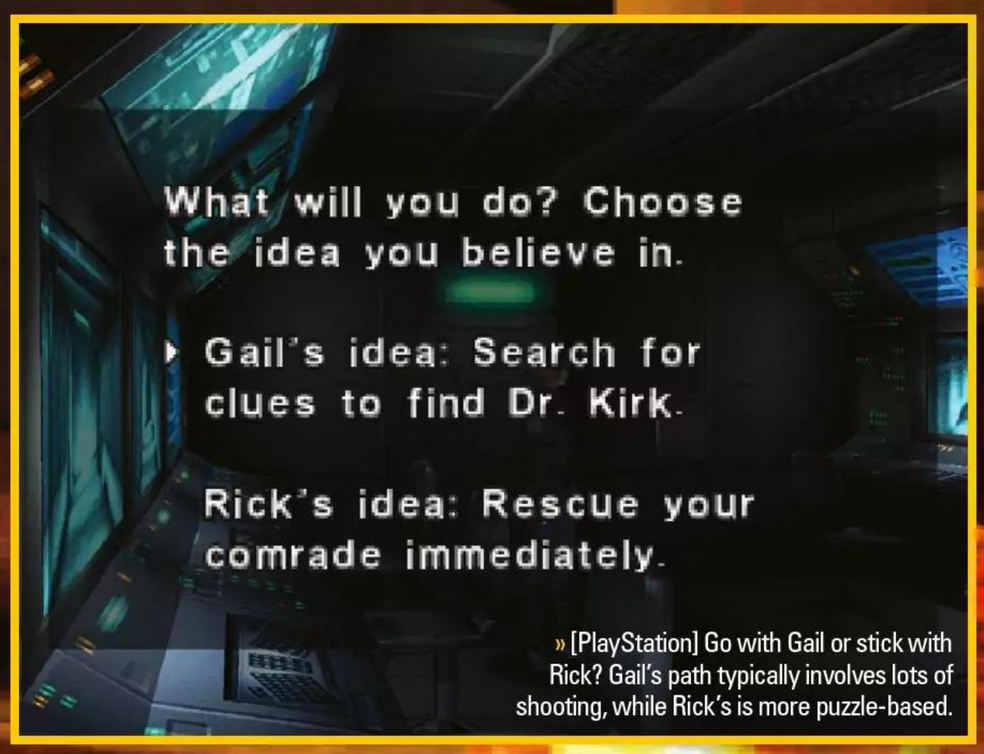
CRISIS



» [PC] Regina's *Dino Crisis* attire is one of Jill Valentine's unlockable costumes in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*.



» [PC] Regina dons the Ancient Type costume. It was acceptable in the Nineties.


What will you do? Choose the idea you believe in.
Gail's idea: Search for clues to find Dr. Kirk.
Rick's idea: Rescue your comrade immediately.

» [PlayStation] Go with Gail or stick with Rick? Gail's path typically involves lots of shooting, while Rick's is more puzzle-based.

DINO DESCENDANTS

TRACING THE GAME'S SEQUELS AND SPIN-OFFS

DINO CRISIS 2

This PS1 and PC sequel takes a conscious step away from survival horror, being more of an action game with strong arcade leanings. It's excellent at what it does, with clever level design, setpiece boss battles and a relentless pace ensuring it never becomes boring.

DINO CRISIS 3

Yes, it's the dodgy 'dinos in space' Xbox entry, where everything that was good about the series was sucked out of an airlock. If the premise doesn't kill it for you, the wonky camera certainly will – especially during the platforming bits. At least it looks nice.

DINO STALKER

This PS2 game's Japanese title, *Gun Survivor 3: Dino Crisis*, identifies it as a rogue entry in the *Resident Evil Survivor* series. It's a lightgun spin-off where you blast dinos in a first-person view, using Namco's G-Con 2 to move and shoot. It features Paula from *Dino Crisis 2*.

DINO CRISIS: DUNGEON IN CHAOS

Can you survive the titular location? Highly unlikely, seeing as this is a mobile game and that means using a 2003-era phone to try and control your character. It plays like a dumbed-down version of *Dino Stalker* and is another curiosity in an increasingly curious series.

EXHUMING DINO CRISIS

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE GAME BOY COLOR CONVERSION?

» Pete Frith worked for Fluid Studio and was involved in the *Dino Crisis* proposal.

Following the success of *Dino Crisis* on home systems, the game's European publisher Virgin Interactive hatched a plan to convert it to the Game Boy Color. Two separate attempts were made. Both failed.

The second of these was in development at Brit outfit M4 in 2000. Considering the handheld hardware, it perhaps wisely eschewed the original's 3D graphics for a top-down 2D approach that was similar to its earlier GBC release *Tasmanian Devil: Munching Madness*. Virgin really liked it – so much so that it asked M4 to rework the game into a *Resident Evil* title that would become 2001's *Resident Evil Gaiden*.

» [Game Boy Color] The plan was to actually replicate the cutscenes from the original, rather than recreate them using static images.

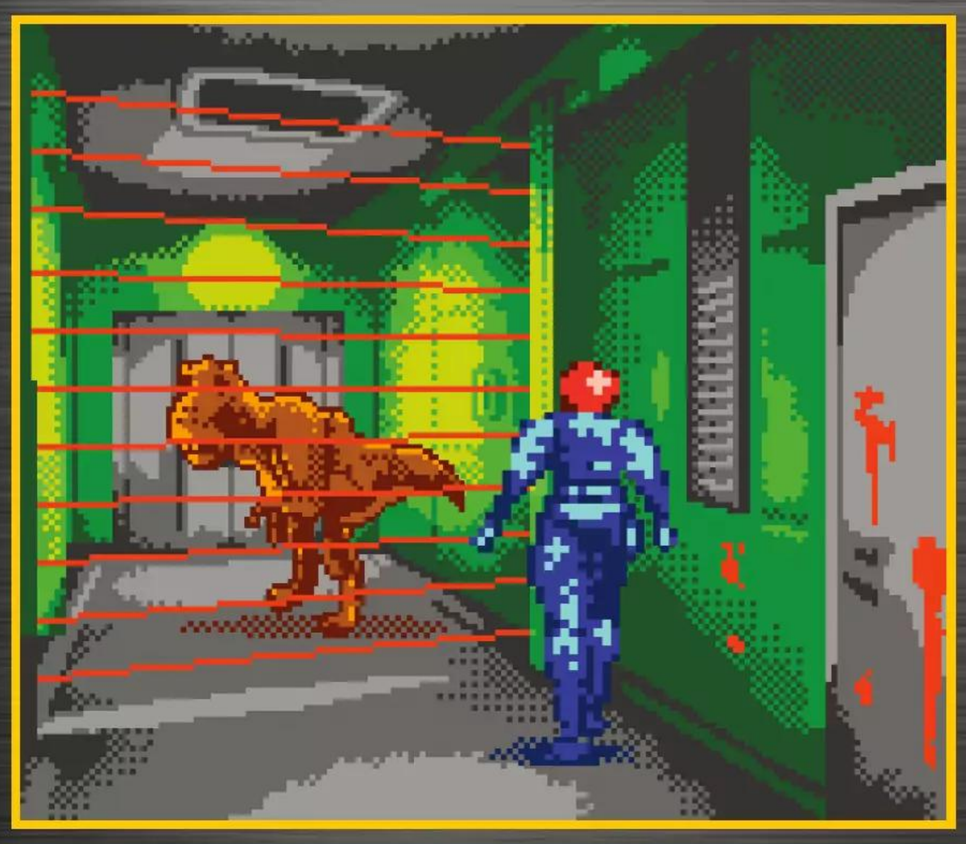
That decision would impact the *first* attempt, which was worked up in 1999 by another UK developer, Fluid Studio. Fluid was behind the ambitious GBC conversion of *Resident Evil*, which attempted to recreate the PlayStation original as closely as possible on the portable's tiny screen. While that was in development, Virgin invited Fluid to pitch a *Dino Crisis* conversion using the same approach. A design proposal was drawn up but it all came to nothing. "*Dino Crisis* never got beyond the design doc stage," says Pete Frith, who worked on the proposal, "because *Resident Evil* got cancelled."

Despite scoring strong previews, Virgin pulled the plug on Fluid's *Resident Evil* conversion, killing the *Dino Crisis* proposal in the process. Pete remains mystified as to why *Resident Evil* was scrapped. Was it a quality concern? Did Capcom step in? "I never heard specific reasons why it was cancelled. It was well received in previews, and we were in the final stages of bug testing, so it really didn't make sense to me. The ROMs that are now available online are much earlier versions of the game compared to where we were at the end." Was the GBC hardware simply too limited for a proper survival horror experience? "Absolutely not. Yes, the hardware had limitations – the main one is that we could only have one zombie sprite on the screen at a time – but we had every room and puzzle from the PS1 version. We were also looking at converting *Resident Evil 2* using the same game engine."

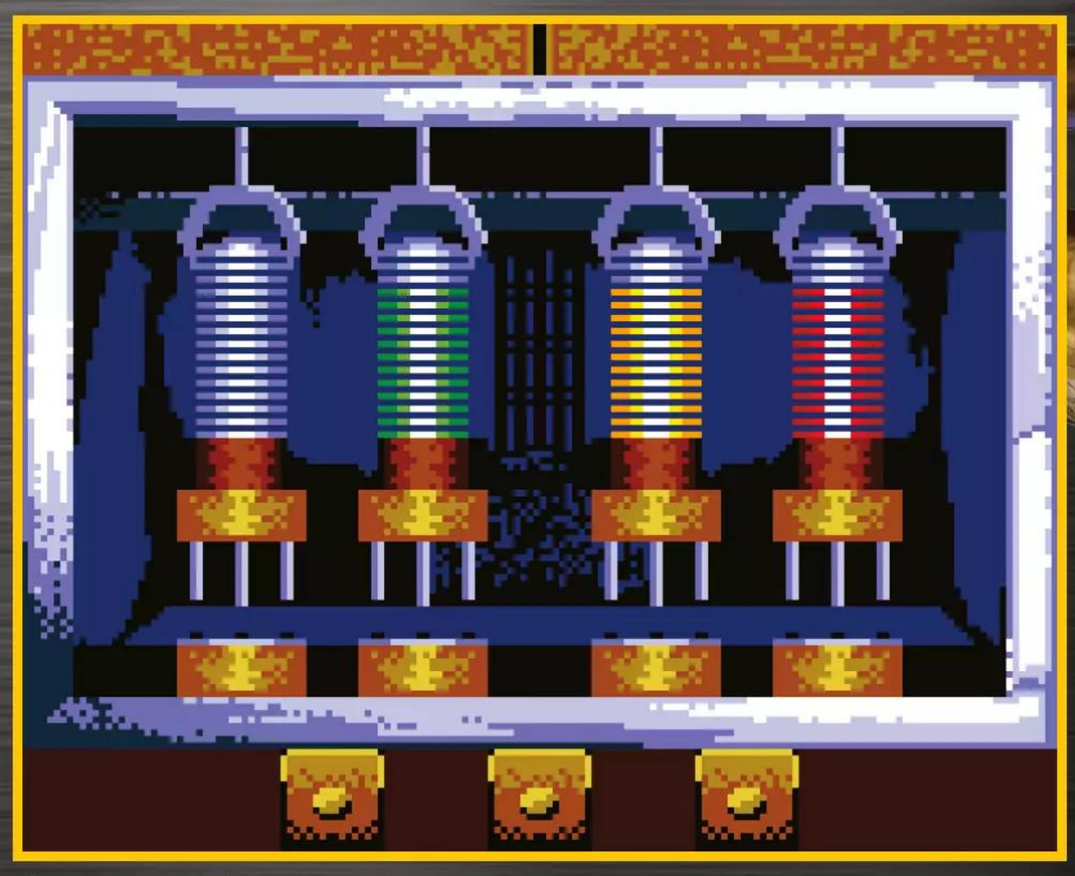
> **"WE HAD TO WORK WITH WHAT WE HAD AT THE TIME"**
> **PETE FRITH**

So what remains of *Dino Crisis*? "The proposal was the only reference document created," confirms Pete. "I actually took the doc personally to Virgin, on 1 November 1999. I recall the date vividly as we worked overnight to get it finished in time for the 7am flight from Sheffield City Airport to London City Airport – it was the first scheduled flight between the two." The document has since surfaced online and it's an interesting read, mainly for the level of ambition on display. Lots of information is provided on how Fluid planned to optimise the graphics to work within the GBC's 40 sprite on-screen limit. Even so, it concedes that only one character and enemy could appear on the screen at any one time, and the camera view would be static. The doc also contains several mocked-up preview screens, which we have used to illustrate this panel. "The screens would have been done by our graphic artist Martin Smith, sadly no longer with us," says Pete.

The GBC would soon be superseded by the Game Boy Advance, and we wondered if that might have been a better fit for survival horror on the go. "Definitely," says Pete. "The greater capabilities of the GBA would have been a great help, but this was 18 months in the future, so we had to work with what we had at the time. Besides, the history of games is full of titles that push the hardware to the max."

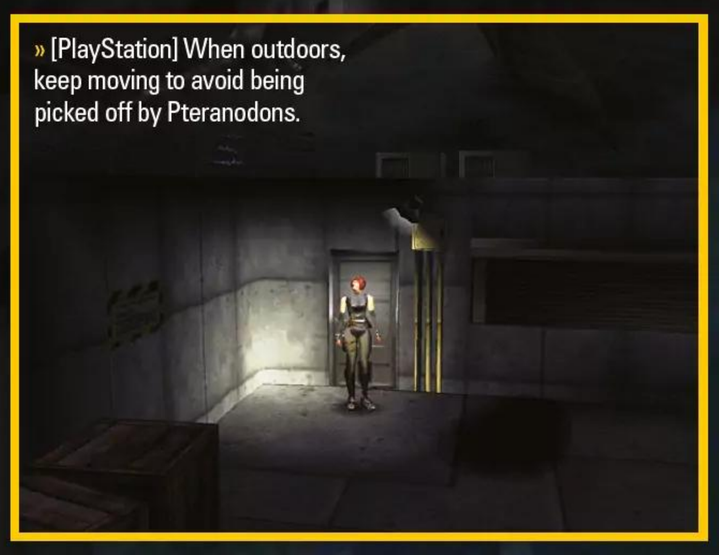


» [Game Boy Color] One of the key mock-up screens included in the proposal. It certainly looks like it could have worked on the handheld.

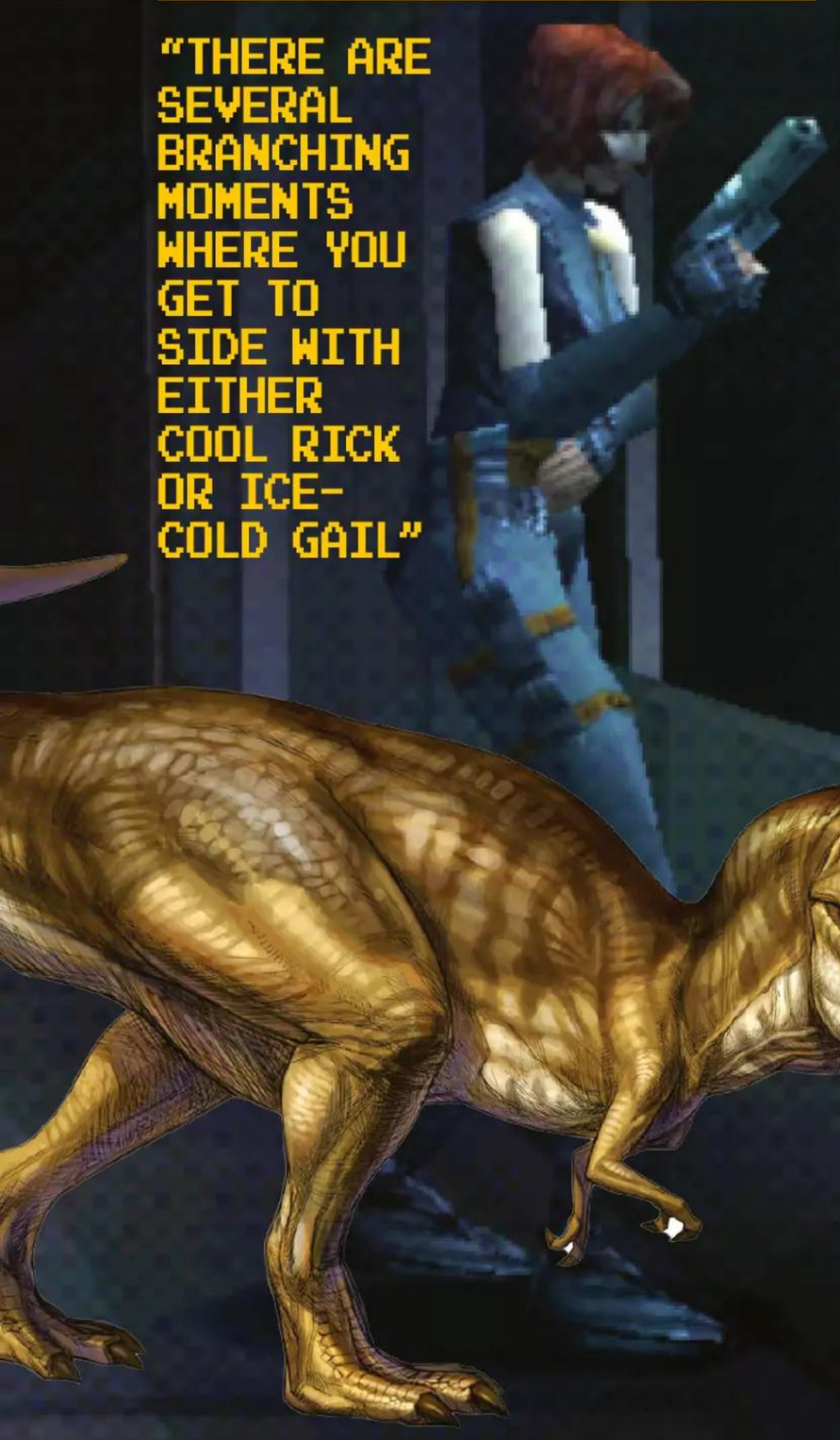


» [Game Boy Color] The fuse box puzzle, as it was to appear in the Game Boy Color version.

» [PlayStation] Therizinosaurus are fierce opposition, especially when two team up to take you down.



» [PlayStation] When outdoors, keep moving to avoid being picked off by Pteranodons.



▶ they can knock your gun out of your hands, leaving you defenceless. Worse still, you can't just leg it through a door like in *Resident Evil*, as the clever buggers follow you from room to room. To redress the balance, the facility features a number of anti-dino measures, such as laser gates and sprinkler systems which you can use to stop/stun them.

Thanks to its survival horror trappings and signature tank controls, *Dino Crisis* can't shake the '*Resident Evil* with dinosaurs' label. But it did move things forward by introducing features that would become commonplace in the genre. It added the quick 180-degree turn, a life-saving move that was quickly lifted for *Resident Evil 3*. You could also walk with your weapon raised, poised to fire – a feature which would become standard in later *RE* games. Greater emphasis on crafting was trialled here too. Pick-ups could be mixed to create healing items (like *RE*'s herbs), and it was also possible to craft new ammo, specifically different types of tranquilliser dart. These darts would briefly incapacitate enemies, but with the right ingredients, you could concoct an insta-death poison dart.

Clearly, the main change was the new visual style, which dropped pre-rendered backgrounds in favour of a 3D graphics engine. The camera was not free-roaming but rather 'directed', in that it moved along fixed paths. This meant it could pan, tilt and track to follow the player's movements. The system was showcased in an early chase scene, where you're running towards the camera and you can see a Raptor gaining on you from behind. It was also used to provide some effective dino point-of-view shots and overall the whole experience was more cinematic than the traditional *RE* games. The consequence of this approach is that locations were relatively bland, being limited to nondescript corridors and fence-enclosed yards, which impacted on the overall atmosphere.

» [PlayStation] Pipe dream? Restoring power to the facility's large elevator is one of the game's trickier puzzles.

WHO'S ON THE MENU?

THE CHARACTERS TRYING NOT TO GET CHOMPED

REGINA
The heroine, Regina is a member of a special task force sent on a mission to infiltrate the isolated research compound. While she's a good all-rounder, her specialism is weapons.

RICK
Rick is the team's tech-head, which is why he spends most of the game tapping away at a computer. He also has medical knowledge and is supremely skilled in wisecracking.

GAIL
Adopting the role of team leader, Gail is the typical military type whose dedication to 'the mission' comes before all else. Naturally he is hiding ulterior motives from the team.

DR KIRK
The reason why the other three are on the island, this enigmatic genius, presumed dead, has been busy cooking up experiments involving a revolutionary new energy source.

When it came to the level of challenge, the game was more in tune with the original *RE* than its sequel. This meant a lack of resources, a healthy amount of backtracking and some rather devious puzzles to solve. In contrast, there was only one playable character in Regina, but there were several branching moments where you chose to side with either cool Rick or ice-cold Gail. And your choices led to three separate endings – where the common factor was you finally toppled the Tyrannosaurus Rex (what else?) that served as the game's recurring 'boss'. Plus, if you clocked the game in less than five hours you unlocked Operation Wipe Out, a fun The Mercenaries-style minigame.

Dino Crisis was a solid package and it reviewed well when released, first in Japan, in July 1999, followed by the rest of the world in the autumn. In the UK, *Edge* magazine awarded the game 8/10 and praised the changes to the *RE* formula. ▶

▶ "*Dino Crisis* is a very different beast. Mikami has crafted a more thoughtful experience this time, [it's] tactical tension rather than survival horror." *CVG*'s Alex Huhtala offered a similar opinion in his 5/5 review. "Rather than another retread of Racoon City, *Dino Crisis* feels like a different game with familiar elements. When it's done this well few will complain. The dinosaurs are incredible and make the Jurassic Park games look pathetic in comparison." In a contrasting view, the dinosaurs gave IGN's Doug Perry some cause for concern. "With essentially four kinds of dinos in the game, once you've seen them all much of the thrill is gone," he commented in a generally glowing 9.2/10 review. "Adding to that, the game is filled with what seems like 90% Raptors. Another complaint – these dinosaurs simply aren't as cool, scary, or creepy as zombies."

The original PlayStation version went on to sell 2.4 million copies worldwide – an impressive number, but less than half what *Resident Evil 2* managed. Still, it was enough to greenlight conversions to the Dreamcast and PC in 2000. The Dreamcast version was a straight port that didn't tap the console's extra power, although the resolution was doubled to 640x480 for an overall improved (though softer) look. It probably didn't help that it was released after *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*, the original Dreamcast entry that evolved the 3D graphics of *Dino Crisis*. The PC version offered up the same resolution bump and added a couple of bonuses – the Operation Wipe Out minigame and the three unlockable costumes were available from the off, and when you started the main game you could choose between two modes: the 'Original' Japanese version, where item placement was different and the difficulty was slightly toned down, and the 'Arrange' version that was released in the West.

Back on PlayStation, *Dino Crisis 2* followed in 2000 and was more action focussed with a silly time-travelling plot (the lush jungle setting required a return to pre-rendered backgrounds, which felt like a backwards step). If the sequel's story jumped the shark, *Dino Crisis 3* nuked the fridge, being set in the future aboard a spaceship and featuring jetpacks and two-headed alien dinos. This 2003 entry was an Xbox exclusive and it's honestly best forgotten.

The same can't be said about the original game – despite Capcom's attempts to seemingly do just that. It was added to the PlayStation Store in 2006, making it playable on PS3, PSP and PS Vita, but it wouldn't be until 2024 that it was made available to download on PS4 and PS5. Outside of PlayStation, the first two games finally arrived on GOG.com in January this year, sporting some welcome visual fixes. Is Capcom whetting our appetite for a full-blown remake? At the time of writing, nothing official has been announced, but it's surely just a matter of time – particularly as a new *Jurassic World* movie is on the horizon. *Dino Crisis Rebirth*, anyone? ✱

» [PC] In the Operation Wipe Out minigame, you have to eliminate the required number of enemies within the time limit.

KNOW YOUR DINO

YOUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE GAME'S TERRIBLE LIZARDS

VELOCIRAPTOR

■ The 'grunts' of the *Dino Crisis* world, these guys can be found throughout the facility, often skulking around corners – listen out for the thud of their feet and pre-bite hiss! Later in the game they hunt in pairs. When you must engage, your handgun should be adequate.

COMPSOGNATHUS

■ These bird-like irritants appear twice in the game, scuttling around the facility's corridors in packs. They will bite if they surround you, but it does very little damage, so try not to waste your precious ammo. Just run away – they're more of a nuisance than anything.

PTERANODON

■ Keep your eyes on the skies in outdoor areas. Pteranodon fly around in pairs and will swoop down and strike/grab you. Wasting ammo on them is a fool's game, so just dash towards the nearest exit. Running in a zigzag fashion makes it difficult for them to target you.

» [PlayStation] The laser gates are crucial to staying alive, especially early on when your weaponry is limited.

THERIZINOSAURUS

■ Just when you've mastered Raptors, these guys enter the fray. Thankfully, they only appear in one location – the freight area on level B3 – and they always patrol in pairs. They will follow you from room to room so it's best to kill 'em. The Grenade Gun works a treat.

TYRANNOSAURUS REX

■ When the screen starts shaking it's time for the T-rex to make one of its several appearances. The best way to repel it is to shoot directly into its open maw when it roars in your face. Regardless of ending, the final act involves defeating the T-rex once and for all.

THE GAME THAT TIME FORGOT

WHAT ARE THE CHANCES OF SEEING A DINO CRISIS REMAKE?

■ With the *Monster Hunter* series and titles like *Exoprimal*, it appears Capcom has an obsession with dinosaurs. Which makes it even more baffling that *Dino Crisis* has not been remade for modern systems. Anyone who has played the *Resident Evil* remakes must have surely entertained the prospect of seeing the Ibis Island incident brought up to date using Capcom's remarkable RE Engine. It seems like a no-brainer, particularly as the demand is clearly there. Last year Capcom ran a poll, asking fans various questions including which series they'd most like to see receive a sequel or new game. The clear winner was *Dino Crisis*, finishing ahead of *Mega Man*, *Devil May Cry* and *Resident Evil*.

A lot of people are keen it seems – although the original game's creator Shinji Mikami is not convinced. Speaking to Eurogamer following the publication of Capcom's poll results, he commented that the mega success of *Monster Hunter* means that there isn't really room for a new *Dino Crisis* game. We respectfully disagree with Mikami-san, and believe fans should be given what they want. Come on Capcom, make it happen. And why not resurrect *Cadillacs And Dinosaurs* while you're at it? Thanks!

» [PlayStation 5] When Capcom first teased *Exoprimal*, many believed it to be a successor to *Dino Crisis*.

» [PlayStation 5] *Monster Hunter* has become Capcom's second best-selling franchise, beaten only by *Resident Evil*.

THE MAKING OF

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG

THE OFFICIAL GAME OF THE MOVIE

HOW DID THE TALENTED TEAM AT UBISOFT MONTPELLIER COPE WITH THE CHALLENGE OF CREATING A VIDEOGAME BASED ON AN ACADEMY AWARD-WINNING BLOCKBUSTER FILM? WITH AS MUCH PASSION AND DEDICATION DEVELOPERS COULD PROVIDE TO ACHIEVE A UNIQUE PROJECT. THIS IS THEIR STORY

WORDS BY GUY MIQUEL-ALBERT

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT MONTPELLIER
- **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 2, VARIOUS
- **RELEASED:** 2005
- **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER/ ADVENTURE

When it comes to adapting a blockbuster film into a videogame, many challenges surface. The main one remains the amount of time allocated to game development. Elisabeth Pellen, lead level designer on *King Kong* remembers, "As a Time To Market project, we had less than two years to develop the videogame, since we needed to synchronise the game's release with the film's. Reaching the expected quality level in such a short period of time was the main challenge for the team." Peter Jackson accordingly picked Ubisoft Montpellier to develop the game among many project proposals because he wanted to work with Michel Ancel, who directed *Beyond Good & Evil*, a game he really enjoyed playing. "About a hundred developers worked on the Montpellier site, split between the Jack and Kong maps and the PS2 and GameCube versions," says Elisabeth.

Florent Sacré started to work on the project as a graphic designer, creating all the textures of the game in its different versions, including Xbox 360, and eventually took the role of lead artist, recruiting about 20 graphic designers. He had originally been in charge of creating a 3D model of the jungle that was sent to Peter Jackson in order to convince him to pick Ubisoft Montpellier as a collaborator. According to Florent, "The team behind the game was very motivated, on the same wavelength. We knew each other really well, were very excited and passionate about working with Peter Jackson and we never considered our project to be Time To Market, we gave everything we had."

> "NAOMI WATTS' VOICE ACTING SHOWED HOW INVOLVED SHE WAS, EMBODYING ANN DARROW"
> **ELISABETH PELLEN**

Ubisoft Montpellier had to cope with another challenge – it had to develop its adaptation with very little knowledge about the film itself, since it hadn't been released yet. "From a level design point of view," explains Elisabeth, "we had to be very imaginative creating a variety of maps since we hadn't watched the film." Florent remembers, "We didn't have access to all the data. I received partial data six, eight,

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RAYMAN (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: ATARI JAGUAR, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1995

RAYMAN 2 : THE GREAT ESCAPE
PLATFORM: NINTENDO 64, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1999

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION 2, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 2003

ELISABETH PELLEN

■ Elisabeth was lead level designer on Jack's FPS sections. She still works at Ubisoft on an unannounced project.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS LE QUÉRÉ

■ Jean-François was lead level designer on Kong's stages. He currently works at Eko Software on an unannounced project.

FLORENT SACRÉ

■ Florent was King Kong's art director. He left Ubisoft to release a Bande Dessinée album, *Au Chant des Grenouilles*.

» [PlayStation 2] One of the most intense sequences involves facing a Brontosaurus herd.

» [PlayStation 2] This essential and iconic film sequence had to be part of the videogame.

twelve months after we began working on the project. I had to rely on the 1933 film to implement a proper artistic direction. I knew Peter Jackson's fondness for this motion picture and I based my work on this first version of King Kong."

The team definitely wanted an experience as cinematic as possible, providing a strong immersive feeling for playing Jack Driscoll, the scriptwriter unwillingly transported by ship to Skull Island, the home of Kong. This was mainly possible thanks to the use of a first-person view, and also thanks to, "The diegetic approach wanted by Michel Ancel and Peter Jackson," says Elisabeth. As a result, there is no UI visible on the screen, absolutely no HUD or target mark. When Jack gets almost short of ammo, for instance, he only roughly indicates verbally his magazine's condition. If Jack gets injured, the screen takes a red hue. "Developing this approach was a true challenge, one of the most exciting in my career, but the resulting immersion eventually remains unique" says Elisabeth. Immersion also relied on the graphics quality of the game, on its mostly natural environments created by Florent and his art team. Florent says the aesthetics imply the use of, "Chiaroscuro cinematography, a lot of work on lights, and on characters' outlines." He also tells us, "To create a sense of danger, I had to create a disequilibrium in the natural environments. A background that tells a story could be considered as my personal touch, I believe. I wanted to fully master the art direction and that was very complicated, since we were only a team of 25 people. I had to reduce the graphic scope of the game, and ask the team to overuse the already designed material kits and objects before I could create new ones. I was the source of all the data used in the game. It was also the method I used during *Beyond Good & Evil*'s development years. It became too overwhelming and I stopped working like this in the following projects."

Ubisoft Montpellier's team used *BG&E*'s graphic engine again to develop *King Kong*, a strong asset considering most of the team ▶

KONG RULES

WHERE UBISOFT MONTPELLIER'S CREATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE

IMMERSIVE CINEMATIC EXPERIENCE

■ As Jack Driscoll, playing in first-person mode, the experience is one of the closest you can find in terms of immersion. UI is non-existent and only Adrian Brody's voice is here to tell you how much ammunition you've got left.

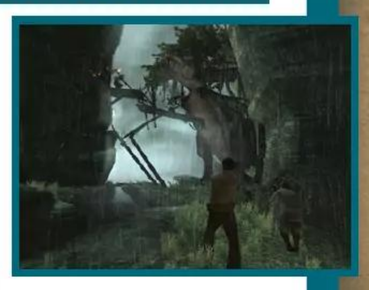
SKULL ISLAND'S ECOSYSTEM

■ Creatures fight and devour each other in such a way Jack can take advantage of it. Luring oversized spiders into eating giant worms you fed them with to open a passage or waiting for a dinosaur to finish its feast are common things to achieve on the island.

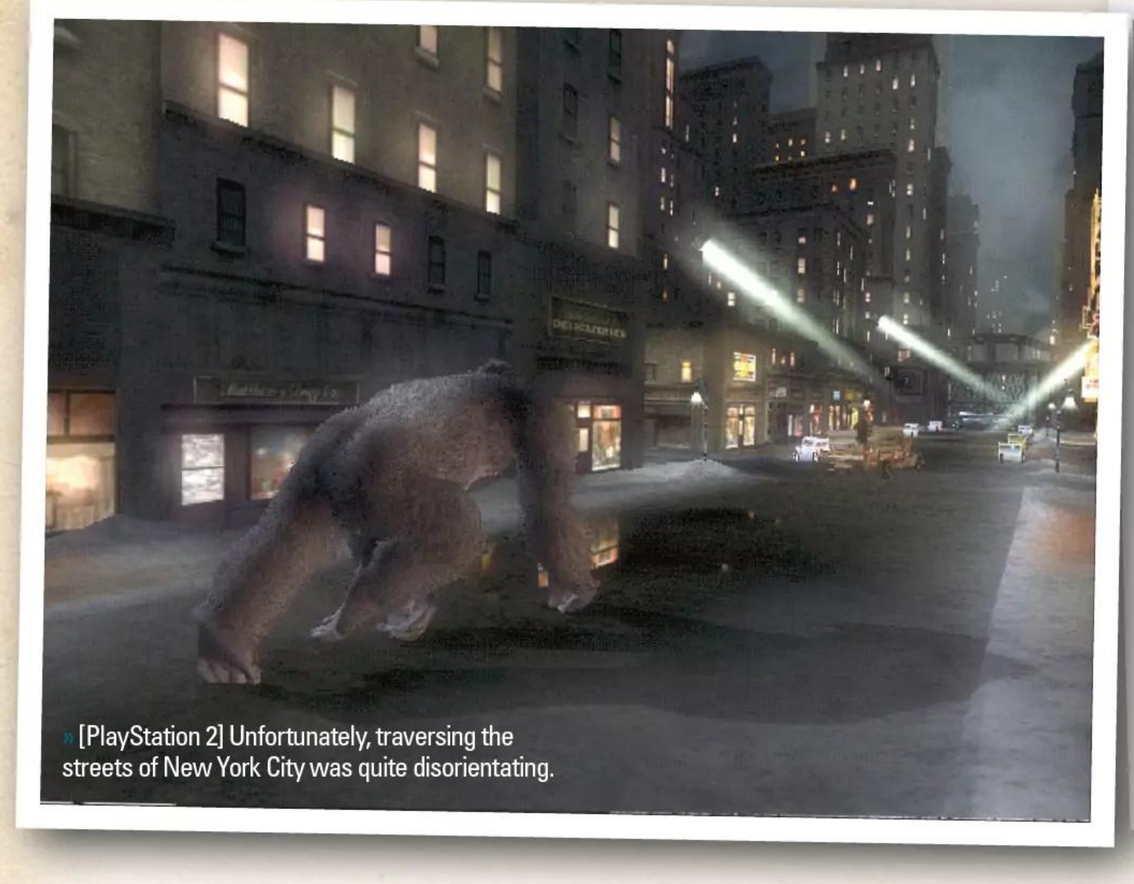
STRONG SURVIVAL FEELING

■ Carrying sometimes only a wooden spear or a pointy stick as a weapon to fight back huge flying creatures or a V-rex neatly highlights the game's survival mechanics. You'll also need to protect Ann so she can open new areas for you.

INTERESTING ENVIRONMENTS



■ A wide range of foes and situations await on Skull Island and in New-York City. Going from one environment to another, you never feel bored since the action is always all new and different, going from avoiding a Brontosaurus' trampling feet to setting the flora on fire.

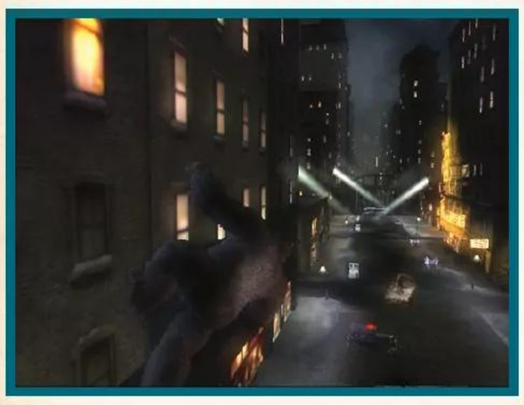


» [PlayStation 2] Unfortunately, traversing the streets of New York City was quite disorientating.

» [PlayStation 2] The beauty meets the beast once again, this time in New York City.

CONVERSION CAPERS

PETER JACKSON'S HIT FILM APPEARED ON NUMEROUS HOME SYSTEMS



PLAYSTATION 2

■ This version is clearly the most advanced. According to Elisabeth Pellen, the Playstation 2 was the lead development platform. It offers crisp graphics and detailed 3D models that only a late-generation title can provide, giving the game its great atmosphere.

GAMECUBE

■ This is very similar to the PS2, Xbox and the first PC adaptation of Peter Jackson's film, although it feels slightly weaker overall. Despite the GameCube's control pad configuration it remains a very enjoyable version to play, and is certainly worth investigating.

XBOX

■ Unfortunately this version isn't backwards compatible. It's closer to the definitive PS2 release than its Xbox 360 counterpart and offers some great lighting and illumination effects (although the rendition of fire is quite poor). It remains a solid alternative to the PS2 version.

PC

■ The first PC release was based on the PlayStation 2 version, while the second one, the *Gamers Edition*, was adapted from the Xbox 360 version, bringing all the related assets and issues. Players looking for a more charming experience should go for the original release.

XBOX 360

■ This version, a Ubisoft Montréal port, released as a launch title. It offers higher-resolution graphics, enhanced audio and more detailed textures. Unfortunately the visuals are quite dark and the 3D models, especially the actors' faces, lack the charm of the original 6th console generation versions.

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

■ This handheld port remains close to the original PS2 version, but uses an obviously lower resolution. While it offers the FPS view and several Kong phases, it loses some scenes and doesn't let you collaborate and interact with other characters.

NINTENDO DS

■ This is by far the weakest port, mainly because using the FPS view without having a right stick makes it rather difficult to play. This is quite unfortunate, since a noticeable technical effort has been provided by Ubisoft Casablanca. Luckily, the Kong sections stay playable.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

■ Combining nice pixel art with a 2D *Legend Of Zelda*-style game design, this adaptation lets you switch between human characters such as Carl or Ann to perform different actions. Kong can also be played in distinct 2D beat-'em-up sections.

» [PlayStation 2] Kong can interact with the environment: here he grabs a car to fight with.

» [PlayStation 2] Some Weta artwork is accessible in the game's extras gallery.

» [PlayStation 2] Beautiful illumination effects are Florent Sacré's trademark.

> "WE NEVER CONSIDERED OUR PROJECT TO BE TIME TO MARKET, WE GAVE EVERYTHING WE HAD"
> **FLORENT SACRÉ**

was very familiar with the Jade Engine. "We were in complete control of our production, the problem being everything was kind of handmade, nothing was really automated," explains Florent. "If something wrong happened, and that happened quite often, through a change of design, for instance, such as adding a piece of map here and there, we had to partly destroy the work done. It led to many fights inside the team, but of course, I couldn't blame the designers, because ultimately they were reporting what the play tests emphasised."

Florent strongly asserts other videogames have never been an inspiration to his art. "Originality is absolutely essential. As videogame developers we have a digital leisure entertainment culture of course, but we must never refer to it in a videogame production. In my work, I would talk about painting, painters, cinema, novels, and obviously about comic books and illustration."

Immersion also means believable non-playable characters. Jack Driscoll is not always alone on Skull Island. He can interact with Hayes, a crew member of the ship, Carl Denham, the film director, or the actress Ann Darrow. He can shoot giant insects to free his friends, and they can give him guns and ammunition. Ann can open new paths for the player by interacting with the environment, in a way Yorda wouldn't disavow when she helps Ico in Fumito Ueda's eponymous game. "Jack being often followed by NPCs, the challenge was to make them move and react synchronised with the player, and adapt their animations to the rugged terrain," Elisabeth specifies. "Creating scripted sequences combined with gameplay features was an essential task in implementing the level design."

To improve this immersive and realistic feeling, the actors featured in the film, including Adrian Brody, Jack Black and Naomi Watts dubbed their polygonal counterparts. "I didn't attend the recordings but I participated in choosing the voices to use in some sequences, " Elisabeth explains. "I couldn't know which to pick when it came to Naomi Watts. Her acting showed how involved she was embodying Ann Darrow."

Interacting with a living environment was an essential feature to implement for Michel Ancel's team. Jack Driscoll can set a wooden stick on fire to burn areas of vegetation to trap dinosaurs or free a path to another section of the map, for instance. According to Elisabeth, this was Philippe Vimont's idea. "Philippe was working as an engineer on the project, always suggesting new ideas, and one day, at break time, he told us, 'I know we don't have any more time but it could have been great to implement a fire propagation system. Just imagine, the player could lure giant scorpions into bushes and then throw an ignited spear to burn them all at once!' Three hours later he asked us to come to his office. He had already coded the feature."

All these features added to the game led to one of its most intense sequences. In a wide canyon where a never-ending herd of Brontosaurus in motion threatens to trample the player at any moment, the objective is to bring a wooden handle to a specific spot in order to open a gate. To make progress in the canyon, Jack needs to set bushes on fire and keep this fire alive using small basins here and there. The task is not easy, all the more so because smaller dinos keep attacking Jack.

"I adored working on this level of the game, but it gave us serious problems," recalls Elisabeth. "One of the difficulties we encountered was to make the Raptors the player could fight with to move around between the Brontosaurus' legs without generating collision bugs. Synchronising the Brontosaurus' scripted sequence with the dynamic fights also required a lot of adjustments. We had to work a lot on the audio, since no UI was implemented, in order to let the player spot the Brontosaurus' out of his field of view, when they were coming to his back, once at the centre of the canyon. The scale between the Brontosaurus herd and the environment also required adjustments in order to maximise the monumental aspects of the dinosaurs and the cliffs. Displaying all this was a true challenge. Michel didn't want only one Brontosaur, but a whole herd, let alone the fire propagating here and there. The fog helped us balance all the level's parameters to eventually achieve a fun and epic sequence."

» [Xbox 360] *King Kong*'s textures were enhanced for the Xbox 360 version.

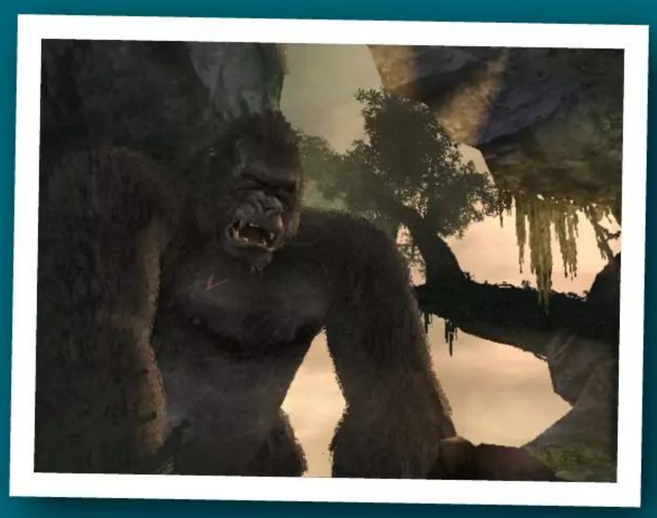
KONG-SIZED ANECDOTES

SO MUCH HAPPENED DURING KING KONG'S DEVELOPMENT

■ As the full draft was almost submitted to Peter Jackson, his son found a detail he didn't approve of on Kong's face after playing the game with his dad. "I had to rework Kong's head, alone in the studio, because there was some detail to change, like a muzzle too big and a disgracious eyebrow," Florent remembers. He also tells us that, "All the textures, all the materials used to create the jungle soil, trees and leaves were created out of photographs he took in the Cévennes, a range of mountains in south central France."

Elisabeth shares that she had to draw some designs on the headed paper of the hotel she was living in during *King Kong*'s conception phase. She recalls, "Raptors invisible to the players were created in order to make a NPC, scared of Raptors as a default option, run as fast as Jack. This wasn't optimal but this way we could add the typical Ubisoft Montpellier's touch to the game direction."

And ultimately, Jean-François remembers, "At E3, I had to play the game in a cinema room in front of Shigeru Miyamoto, Satoru Iwata and the whole Nintendo staff. So much pressure!"



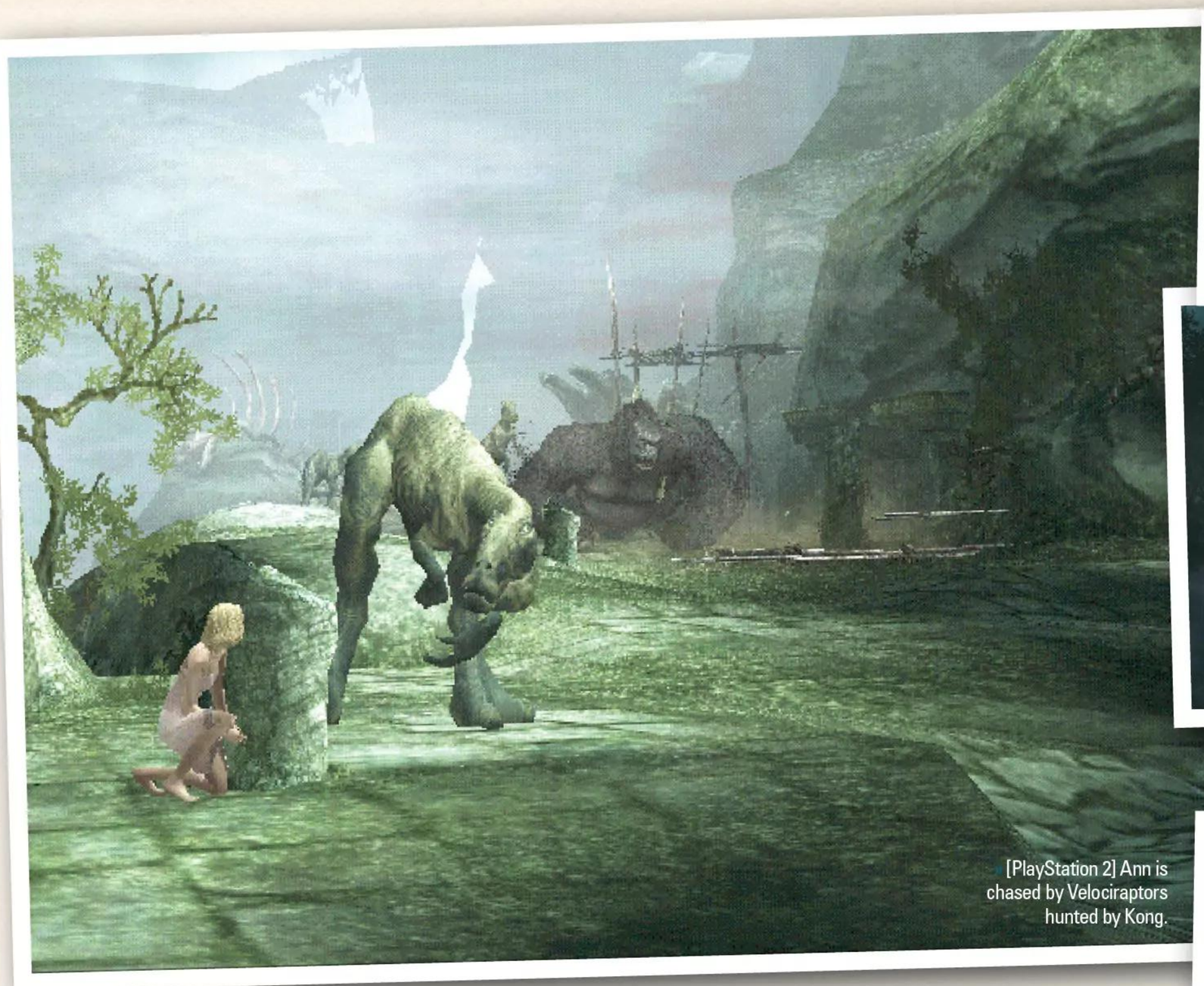
» [PlayStation 2] As a last-minute task, adjusting Kong's muzzle and eyebrow had been necessary.

Jean-François Le Quéré already worked as a level designer on *Beyond Good & Evil*. He started working on the *King Kong* project at the same position, specifically on Jack's levels but also doing research on the Kong phases at the same time. "At some point, considering the project's size, the game had to be developed by two teams: the Jack FPS sequences would be developed by Ubisoft Montpellier while the Kong phases needed Ubisoft Montréal's talented developers. But it didn't work this way and the Kong part work came back to Montpellier, with a few members of the Montréal team. I became the lead level designer of this team from this moment on."

He considers his personal style implies a very cinematic approach to level design. "I worked a lot on the camera with Fred Houde, a developer, to really understand how to shoot King Kong sequences, during fights and parkour scenes," he continues. "My biggest challenge was to preserve King Kong's might from the film to our videogame project. In other words, I had to make him look very big. I wanted to keep the camera close to him. It required many tricks in order for the player to understand where to go and with what to interact. We didn't really need any HUD to achieve this, thanks to the art team. They succeeded in laying emphasis

» [PlayStation 2] Sniper action is often necessary to help NPCs or shoot a lantern to burn bushes.

» [PlayStation 2] Kong's parkour sequences are very intuitive and fun.



» [PlayStation 2] Ann is chased by Velociraptors hunted by Kong.

» [PlayStation 2] Not really the best circumstances for a first meeting.

» [PlayStation 2] Another intense sequence, fighting locals and two V-rex on a raft.

» It's not uncommon to feel weak and desperate playing Jack.

» Letting the fauna fight and eat each other is essential to survival.

on game elements using textures and contrasts against the background."

This meant extra work, though. "We wanted him to be able to fight many creatures of varied sizes and to keep his gorilla ability to pick up tree trunks or climb some areas, still using this special camera that sometimes changes angle or keeps Ann in the foreground," continues Jean-François. "Concerning the parkour sequences, we used a few tricks to make them enjoyable and spectacular. Kong is a giant gorilla who could never fall down or miss a jump in his own jungle environment. It means that the parkour gameplay could never be based on succeeding a jump or not, but on the sense of urgency felt to make Kong reach a specific place in order to save Ann from a giant bat or a V-rex."

With that in mind, the team made some creative decisions. "Kong's movements needed to be powerful and dynamic when he runs on creepers or swings, or is hanging on a piece of tree or background," says Jean-François. "I worked a lot on these sequences' pace: jump, slide along creeper, jump, run on a wall, etc. I also worked a lot on the way to shoot them. A trick we used was using Kong's short animation time during which the player can't interact, to insert special cameras. I'm thinking about this specific moment when Kong swings and I create a bottom view cut to see him moving above us."

Not every aspect of playing as Kong worked though, with the section that sees Kong navigating the streets of New York being particularly tricky. "We wanted a more open part with a street maze, a new environment where Kong had to feel lost," explains Jean-François, "but with the change of cameras on cars shooting at us and the streets all very similar to each other, it was the player who eventually felt lost."

> "ANN DELIBERATELY HELPS KONG... THERE IS SOME ICO BEHIND THIS"
> **JEAN-FRANÇOIS LE QUÉRÉ**

While a lot of the fun from playing as Kong is using his brute strength and his impressive agility, the team also wanted to capture the special relationship he shares with Ann. This is shown in-game by Ann deliberately helping Kong at certain points. Kong can carry Ann and drop her in higher places so she can interact with the environment using fire, for instance, to help him get through a path. Jean-François feels, "There is some *Ico* behind this too."

On release, the game received critical acclaim, scoring excellent grades, including 9/10 in *Official PlayStation Magazine* and 8/10 in *Edge*, however *games™* surprisingly gave a quite severe score of 6/10 in comparison to other reviews of the time. There is no doubt, though, this blockbuster film adaptation achieved one of the best Time To Market products ever, driven by a truly passionate team. An ambitious videogame that, in many ways, was ahead of its time. ✱

1P
The Rock
Special
TYPE B
A•G
G•S
S•A

WWF Royal Rumble

THAT'S A SWERVE, BRO!

RETROREVIVAL

» ARCADE » 2000 » YUKE'S

Nostalgia has recently drawn me back to the time I became a wrestling fan – the Attitude Era of the WWF, when Stone Cold Steve Austin and The Rock ruled the wrestling world. While the shows are still fun, the pace can be bewildering thanks to the "Crash TV" philosophy of the head writer at the time, Vince Russo. His divisive approach championed edgier and more controversial characters and stories, as well as frequent title changes and unexpected plot twists that sometimes made little sense. The emphasis on in-ring action was reduced, so a full tag team match – complete with ring entrances, outside interference and a post-match attack – could be over in under five minutes.

Though Vince Russo had left for WCW by the time *WWF Royal Rumble* hit arcades, this chaotic game certainly brings him to mind. Much like his writing style, the game comes in for a lot of criticism – largely based on the Dreamcast port, which didn't add the features fans expected of console wrestling games at the time. The titular Royal Rumble mode, in which you try to throw 30 wrestlers out of the ring against a time limit, made sense in the arcades but felt odd and inauthentic at home.

However, Exhibition mode really embraces the Russo tropes. You want outside interference? Other wrestlers frequently perform run-in attacks, and you even get a partner whose purpose is to perform blatant double team moves. You want hardcore brawls? Your partner can supply weapons, and the referee won't bat an eyelid. You want unexpected nonsense? Just wait for the lights to randomly dim while the wrestlers look confused. As if abducted by aliens, they'll suddenly carry on scrapping in a random backstage area – maybe a parking lot where you can be hit by moving cars, or a kitchen with meat passing through on hooks. The action may not be wholly authentic, but it captures the era's wild spirit perfectly for coin-op players. *

» The granddaddy of 3D fighting games is back, as Sega finally brings Virtua Fighter 5 to the PC in a newly updated form. If scrapping isn't your style, you'll find more reviews, including Ninja Gaiden 2 Black and X-Out Resurfaced over the page

» [PC] Pai blasts Jeffry with a powerful hit to the gut, sending him flying backwards.

Virtua Fighter 5 REVO

SEGA'S VETERAN FIGHTER STILL PACKS A PUNCH

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED:** PC
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £15.99
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** RYU GA GOTOKU STUDIO
- **BUY IT FROM:** ONLINE
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

Just as it seemed as though *Tekken* had the 3D fighting game world all to itself, Sega committed to a revival of its genre-establishing series, teasing a new game at The Game Awards back in December. However, this is not that game. Instead Sega has chosen to renew *Virtua Fighter 5* for what we must presume is the final time, by giving it a new PC port with rollback netcode and a range of subtle tweaks to the game balance.

The return of a nearly 20-year-old game would be disappointing, if it weren't for the fact that the fast, refined combat of *Virtua Fighter 5* is so excellent that it feels practically ageless. It's a classic example of a game that is easy to learn and hard to master. The series' simple three-button control scheme is retained and there are no on-screen gauges or Super Moves to worry about, but each character has plenty of moves to learn and the game possesses a tremendous amount of strategic depth. If you're looking for a fighting game to sink some serious competitive energy into, it's still one of the very best.

You'll need to have that competitive instinct too. This game is built off of *Virtua Fighter 5: Ultimate Showdown* for the PS4, and just like that release, *Virtua Fighter 5 REVO* offers very little for solo players to get their teeth into. Unless you need to spend some time with the robust Training mode to learn the game, Arcade mode is the sole point of interest – there's nothing like the Quest mode of *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution* here. It's forgivable given the budget price point, but definitely worth noting.

» [PC] Some arenas feature walls, in others you're at risk of the dreaded Ring Out victory.

» *Virtua Fighter 5* was one of the first games to use Sega's HD-capable Lindbergh arcade board, and introduced new fighters Eileen and El Blaze. The game first launched in Japanese arcades in the summer of 2006, before being ported to PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 in 2007, the latter with online play. The arcade-only update *Virtua Fighter 5 R* added Jean Kujo and reinstated Taka Arashi in 2008, *Virtua Fighter 5 Final Showdown* hit arcades in 2010 and consoles in 2012. *Virtua Fighter 5 Ultimate Showdown* appeared on PS4 in 2022.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Halls Of Torment

I just discovered this on the Steam Deck and have become obsessed with its *Diablo*-inspired visuals and loot drops.

NICK

Virtua Fighter 5 REVO

I went on an 11-match winning streak while writing this review. *Virtua Fighter* has still got it, and apparently I have as well.

» [PC] Akira still looks like the default martial artist, and he's still deceptively tricky to use.

» [PC] *Virtua Fighter 5 REVO* still manages to look striking at times, thanks to some visual updates.

Fortunately, online multiplayer has been improved over *Ultimate Showdown* with the addition of rollback netcode, which has worked very well for us as we've had great matches both playing with nearby players and across continents. However, as the visual upgrades from the PS4 game have been carried across to the PC, hitting a consistent 60fps might require some settings tweaks. [It's 60fps on default Steam Deck – Ed] The effort is worth it for smooth online matches, but you're at the mercy of your opponent's decisions in that regard and if they don't do the same, the fights will suffer.

If you do indulge in competitive play, you'll likely find this the best version yet. The game's first balance changes in over a decade see old moves returning, plus tweaked move properties and character weights – nothing so radical as to make the game feel brand-new, but certainly enough to bring the stronger and weaker fighters closer together. It's not worth upgrading from the PS4 version though, as these changes have been patched into *Ultimate Showdown* too.

While the base version of *Virtua Fighter 5 REVO* is cheap, character customisation options are locked behind DLC packs at £7.99 each. It's not a deal breaker but it does feel rather miserly, especially as there are fewer cosmetic items than in past iterations of the game. On the plus side, if you splash out for the *30th Anniversary Edition* (£39.99) which bundles the Legendary, *Yakuza* and Swimsuit DLC packs, you also get a neat 45-page digital art book showing images from the development of the original *Virtua Fighter*, as well as a mammoth series soundtrack with over 500 tunes from across the series, including unused music.

If you're intrigued but unsure and want to dabble, you should also be aware that there is an option that may suit you better – particularly if you're a solo player. *Virtua Fighter 5: Final Showdown* is available within *Yakuza 6*, *Yakuza: Like A Dragon* and the two *Judgment* spin-off games, and while it doesn't have the visual upgrades, the balance changes or online play, it does feature all the same characters and stages, and includes local multiplayer too.

Still, if you're part of the intended competitive audience, *Virtua Fighter 5 REVO* absolutely delivers – it tweaks just enough to improve the game balance without throwing things out of whack, while finally giving the series the modern netcode it sorely needed. It may not be the new game we're all still waiting for, but it's a great reminder of why it's worth being excited for a new *Virtua Fighter* in the first place, and should serve to tide players over well until it arrives. ✱

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

FIGHTERS MEGAMIX

▼ SOMETHING NEW

TEKKEN 8

In a nutshell

The improved netcode and balance tweaks in *Virtua Fighter 5 REVO* ensure the classic fighter is still absolutely brilliant and a competitive player's dream. The lack of modes for solo players to enjoy is all that prevents it from scoring far higher.

» Score **82%**

» [PC] Sarah tries to cover up as Vanessa delivers some ground and pound offence.

» [PC] Aoi's neck is about to be compacted, as Wolf delivers the dreaded Burning Hammer.

» [PC] Rollback netcode ensures that the game's online experience is smooth, if both players have capable machines.

RETRO ROUNDUP

WE LOOK AT THE LATEST RETRO-RELATED RELEASES

★ PICK OF THE MONTH

Ninja Gaiden 2 Black

» **System:** PC (tested), PS5, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £39.99 » **Buy it from:** Online

Not content with announcing that *Ninja Gaiden 4* was in development, Koei Tecmo also used Microsoft's recent Xbox Developer Direct show to shadow-drop a brand-new remaster of *Ninja Gaiden II*. Team Ninja's latest update is based on the PS3 *Sigma* release, but it has been significantly retooled and also adds a new HERO PLAY STYLE mode, neatly designed to introduce new players to the hyper-kinetic and extremely gory world of hero Ryu Hayabusa. Worry not though, for if you're also after a hardcore challenge, Team Ninja's game certainly delivers one.

Graphically, even though *Ninja Gaiden 2 Black* isn't a full-on remaster, it's still been significantly improved over previous versions of the game, so much so that if you want to play it on Valve's Steam Deck you're going to be limited to 40-ish fps or a locked 30fps if you don't mind playing on minimal settings. 60fps was no problem for our PC and the higher framerate really allows you to enjoy the fast-paced action that the game offers. Being based on *Sigma*, *Black* (so called because Team Ninja consider it the definitive version of the game) offers numerous extras over the Xbox 360 original, including the ability to play as Ayana, Rachel and Momiji, several new bosses and various tweaks to combat. There are still fewer enemies in this version compared to the Xbox 360 original and certain omissions from *Sigma* don't appear to have returned here, but all the gore and dismembered limbs missing from that game are back and Ryu's enhanced weapon set is still great fun to experiment with.

The story remains bobbins and the combat engine does show its age at times, but it's hard not to be impressed by the over-the-top action that *Ninja Gaiden 2 Black* constantly delivers.

» Score **81%**

» [PC] Team Ninja's game certainly isn't for the squeamish – there are limbs and heads flying absolutely everywhere.

» [PC] If you don't recognise Momiji, she first appeared in *Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword* on Nintendo's DS.

X-Out: Resurfaced

» **System:** Switch (version tested), PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, PC » **Buy it for:** £17.99
» **Buy it from:** Online, iningames.com

Here's an updated remaster of a submarine-based horizontal shmup, originally released for the Amiga by Rainbow Arts in 1990. You get the freedom to set up your fleet, so you can spend big on high firepower or buy multiple more modest craft for extra lives. The life bar tells you that it's still a distinctly European-style example of the genre, but the difficulty has been adjusted in multiple places to make the game less frustrating than the original release. The visual upgrades are modest, though the widescreen play area is appreciated, and there are no visual options to speak of. In all though, it's been treated with care.

NICK THORPE

» Score **80%**

The Games Of A Lifetime

» **Buy it for:** £29.99 » **Buy it from:** Online

Not content with being involved in some of the biggest gaming magazines in UK history, Julian 'Jaz' Rignall has now written a book about his impressive career. It covers his early life living on a smallholding in Wales to joining *Zzap!64*, creating *Mean Machines* and its spin-off magazines, his love of sci-fi and literature and much, much more. As you'd expect, the book largely focusses on the Eighties and Nineties and is filled with enjoyable anecdotes that include competitions with *Zzap!64* readers, playing *Elite*, *Super Mario Bros*, *Street Fighter II* and *World Of Warcraft* for the first time and visiting big shows like CES. Yes, it can ramble a little at times, but you can't help but be impressed by Julian's sheer passion for the medium, a passion that has lasted nearly 50 years. With numerous behind-the-scenes photos and great Wil Overton illustrations of Julian, this is another essential Bitmap Books release.

DARRAN JONES

Macross: Shooting Insight

» **System:** Switch (tested), PC, PS4, PS5
» **Buy it for:** £33.50+ » **Buy it from:** Online

The first *Macross* game to ever get localised to the West is a rather disappointing release. While the multi-threaded story should please fans of the series, the actual shooting action is pretty forgettable. Despite offering plenty of different playing styles ranging from side-on and into-the-screen sections, *Shooting Insight* suffers from dull enemy waves, cluttered backgrounds and bullets that can be often hard to see. It also has numerous performance issues on Switch. Add in some brutal difficulty spikes and a bizarre life bar system that means you'll be expected to tackle an entire new level with virtually no energy and *Macross* makes for one disappointing shmup.

DARRAN JONES

» Score **58%**

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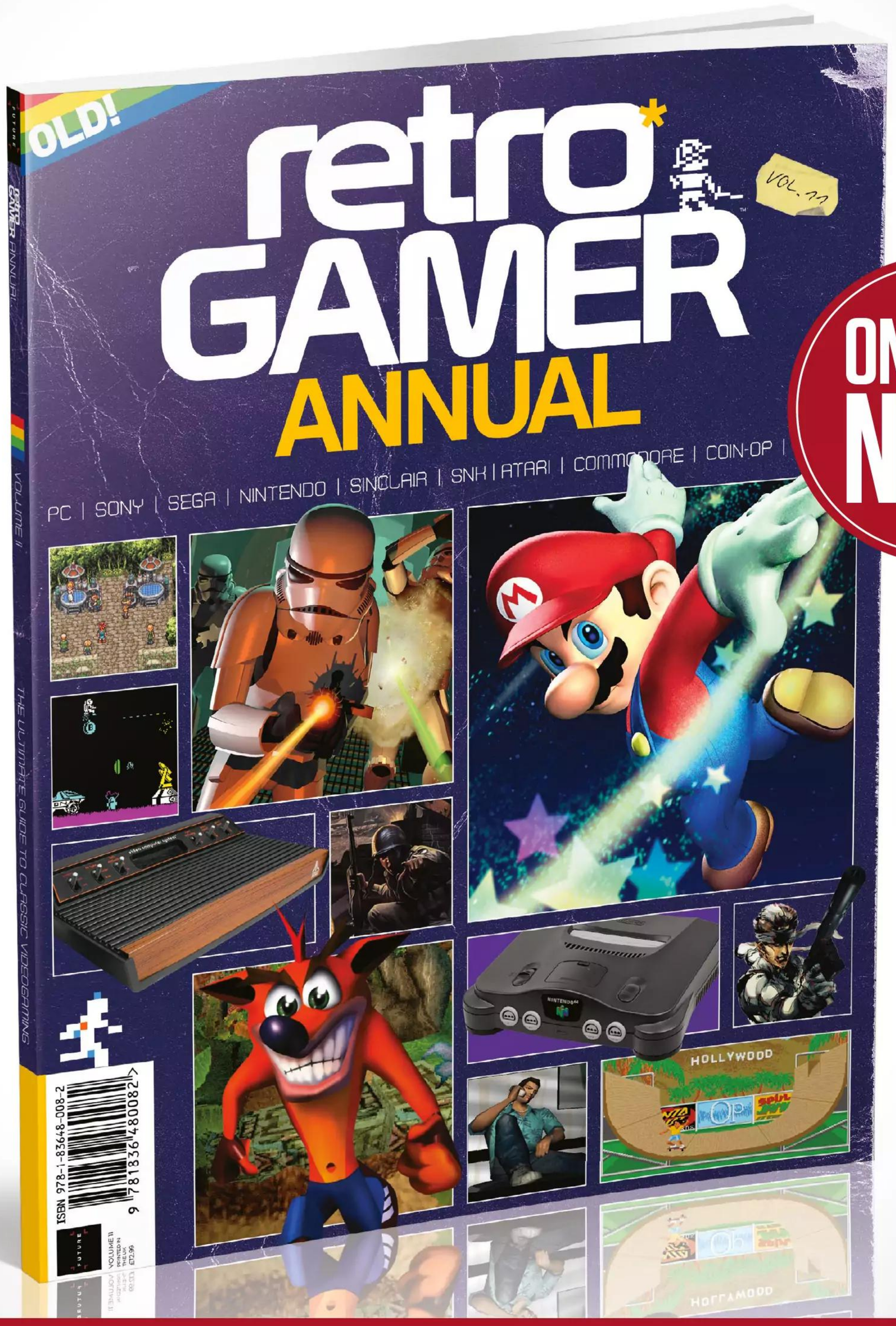

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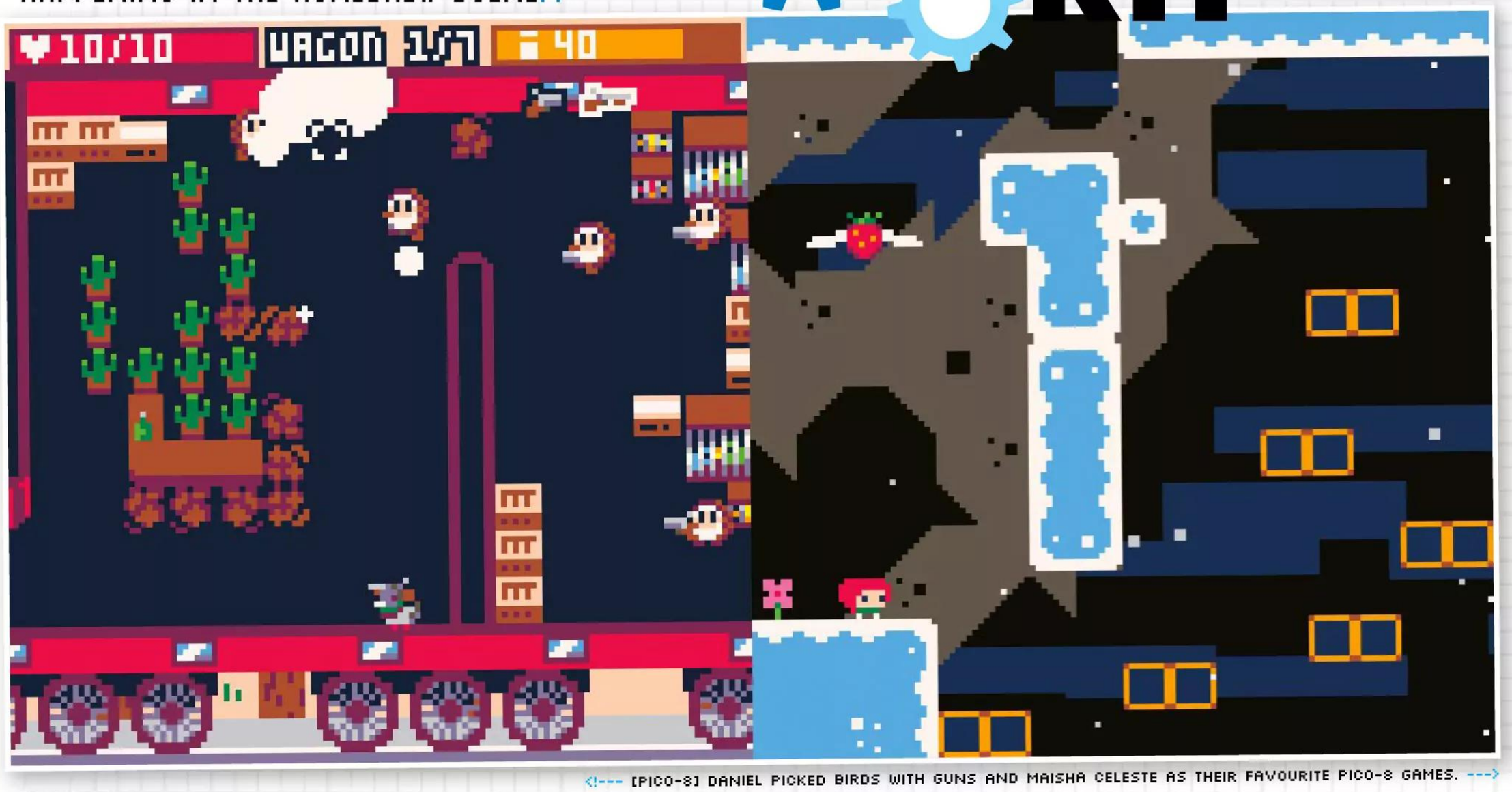
FUTURE

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>



<!--- [PICO-8] DANIEL PICKED BIRDS WITH GUNS AND MAISHA CELESTE AS THEIR FAVOURITE PICO-8 GAMES. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

THE PORTABLE PICO-8

<INTRO> A TEAM FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO IN CANADA IS CREATING THE PEX HANDHELD CONSOLE, WHICH IS TAILOR-MADE FOR PICO-8 GAMES </INTRO>

<INTRO> WE HAVE COVERED MANY DIFFERENT FORMATS OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS OF THIS REVIVED HOMEBREW COLUMN, AND WE'VE YET ANOTHER NEW ONE, AS OUR CHAMPION CODER IS WORKING ON A NEW WONDERSWAN COLOR TITLE. THERE'S ALSO A MEGA DRIVE HORROR GAME IN DEVELOPMENT, REVIEWS OF THREE 8-BIT COMPUTER RELEASES WITH VARIOUS GAMEPLAY STYLES, AND OUR MAIN FEATURE LOOKS AT A NEW HANDHELD SPECIALLY DESIGNED FOR PICO-8 GAMES. ENJOY. </INTRO>

<!--- THIS PRODUCTION VERSION OF THE SYSTEM IS CURRENTLY WITH BETA TESTERS. --->

<BODY> **Computer science undergraduate Daniel Lui explains the origins of the Pex console.** "It started as a side project where we wanted to learn more about hardware and said, 'Let's build a console,' grabbing some off-the-shelf components, an LCP and a microcontroller. We hacked together a really quick PICO-8 emulator over a weekend." Maths student Maisha Thasin picks up the story. "Our main selling point is we constantly listen to our customers, the PICO-8 community. Our Discord has grown to over 150 members now. There are developers, and people doing UI designs for us; we recently had our first public meeting, and it was really nice. We went from using an ESP32 [microcontroller] to running Linux."

Daniel had tried PICO-8 on other handhelds (see PLAYING PICO-8) such as The Clockwork GameShell. "The engineering is great, being able to put it together yourself was awesome," he says. "I think the screen aspect ratio is a bit too small. And it just runs Splore [PICO-8's 'Explore' function for finding/downloading games], which is not the most mobile-friendly. We got the RGB30, the first time I saw that it blew me away – we needed that square display." This influenced v3 of the console, now in the hands of select beta testers.

All the functions of PICO-8, including the ability to create your own games, will be supported by the new hardware. "We're developing our own open-source wrapper, like OnionOS, in the style of PICO-8," Daniel explains. "Essentially, we're making our own Splore plus more from scratch." Maisha elaborates, saying, "We also have other features in our launcher, you can take screenshots and have your own music player. And we're still thinking of more features to add."

Interestingly, the Pex won't just play PICO-8 games as Daniel points out, "Our officially supported platform is PICO-8, we want to focus on one platform

PLAYING PICO

OFFICIAL BBS

<Games uploaded to lexaloffle.com/bbs can be accessed through the console's SPLORE (explore) command, such as *PegBall* by Max0sirus. />

A BROWSER

<Sites like itch.io or your own website can run PICO-8 games in a modern browser, like Brian Vaughn's *Bustin'* here. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- THE PEX TEAM – SANTIAGO DEL SOLAR (MECHANICAL EXPERT), DANIEL LIU (DESIGNER, COFOUNDER), AND MAISHA THASIN (COMMUNITY LIAISON, COFOUNDER). --->

<!--- HERE'S VERSION 1 OF THE CONSOLE RUNNING ON A MICROPROCESSOR. --->

<!--- HERE'S VERSION 1 WHICH WAS ASSEMBLED WITH OFF-THE-SHELF COMPONENTS. --->

and deliver the best experience. But since we are based on Linux, there's nothing stopping you from booting whatever stuff you want on our device."

There are ambitious plans afoot, including accessories that Daniel wants to create. "Something that we're really excited for is a dock. They'll have an HDMI, so you can play on your TV. And it's going to have a bunch of ports – we want to bring back couch gaming with wired controllers, that type of feel. We're going to have up to four controllers, and then you can play all your favourite multiplayer PICO-8 games."

Another exciting prospect is for cartridges, with Daniel showing us a 3D-printed example. "The idea is to have a cartridge slot, you can flash your own PICO-8 games onto the cartridge – a physical thing that you can hand to your friends, or you can sell it online," he continues. "Maybe we can ship it with some popular games in the community and support the original developers." Pex is promising portable PICO-8 play, and we're genuinely pumped for it. Visit pex-labs.com/ for more information. </BODY>

<INTRO> FIVE OTHER WAYS TO PLAY PICO-8 GAMES RIGHT NOW </INTRO>

CLOCKWORK GAMESHELL

<The open-source console allows the player to build their own custom design or use the provided shell, which gives you a bit of choice. />

POWKIDDY RGB30

<Powkiddy and other recent Linux handhelds can play PICO-8, through the alternative Onion OS or frontends such as Emulation Station. />

STEAM DECK

<Using the RetroDeck frontend or built-in Proton compatibility, you can launch and play PICO-8 games on Valve's handheld. />

NEWSBYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<**Amiga:** ZR Games released a brilliant conversion of *Yoomp*, compatible with all Amiga models. Choose your own price for it at bit.ly/yoomp-amiga />

<**C64:** Psytronik's new double-game cartridge, *Ladybird* and *Avalan*, launched in February along with new cassette titles. You can buy it from psytronik.net />

<**Game Boy Advance:** Build your city in *µCity Advance*, ported from the Game Boy Color. Get planning at bit.ly/ucity-advance />

<**Intellivision:** Check out new titles at Intellivision Revolution, including *Pitfall 3* and *Traffic Jam*. There's more info at intellivisionrevolution.square.site />

<**Mega Drive:** Fabio Fernandes is porting Cinemaware's slapstick comedy game *The Three Stooges*, with a demo available. Get slapping over at bit.ly/stooges-md />

<**Neo Geo:** *Shinobi* appears on the SNK console, thanks to Hoffman – and he's now converting *Golden Axe*. Follow the progress at bit.ly/shinobi-neogeo />

<**NES:** Michel Iwaniec has created the NES equivalent of GBStudio, a similar drag-and-drop environment for creating NES games. Download it from bit.ly/bbstudio-nes />

<**Oric:** Syntax Error Software's Pas6502, which compiles Pascal code for 6502 processors, has been updated to support the Oric range of machines. You'll find it at bit.ly/pas6502 />

<**PC:** Juan J Martinez's *Alien Intruder*, is a great single-screen platformer (it has VGA graphics and requires an i286 or later). Give it a try at bit.ly/intruder-dos />

<**PICO-8:** Check out the PicoMax compilation of games from NuSan (bit.ly/picomix) and *Solitomb* by Jakub Wasilewski, which will get an enhanced Steam port. You'll find it by visiting bit.ly/solitomb-p8 />

<**Various:** Play the demo versions of *Cronela's Mansion* (see **RG**263) at bit.ly/cronela-demo />

<**ZX Spectrum:** Kempston is hosting the CSSCGG 2025 (kempston.itch.io/cgc2025) and Clebin Games has released *Gilligan's Mine*. Find it at bit.ly/gilligan-zx />

CHAMPION CODER

MATTHEW KERSEY

<INTRO> MATTHEW TELL US ABOUT THE NEW GAME HE IS WORKING ON, A WONDERSWAN RUN-AND-GUN GAME FEATURING DEMON CATS </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: SPARTANBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA, USA WEBSITE: LACONIC.SOFTWARE FORMAT: WONDERSWAN PREVIOUS GAMES: STRIFE SISTERS (PC ENGINE, ANDROID) WORKING ON: DEMON CAT SNATCHERS (WONDERSWAN) />

SO HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE WONDERSWAN HOMEBREW SCENE?

After I completed my last game, I looked for other platforms that were in need of some fresh new homebrew. I had decided on either the PC-FX or the WonderSwan. I chose WonderSwan because there was an excellent toolchain available to get started working. Unfortunately, the tools for the PC-FX just aren't there yet but there are people working on them!

<!--- MATTHEW SHOWS HIS GAME RUNNING ON REAL HARDWARE. --->

CAN YOU TELL US WHAT INSPIRED DEMON CAT SNATCHERS?

The game is heavily inspired by two of my favourite PC Engine games, *Horror Story* and *Youkai Douchuuki*. Both involve demons and hell. I love cats, so I thought it'd be funny if cats were originally demons from hell who tricked humans into allowing them to live among us.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR DEVELOPMENT SETUP?

Everything is done with Asie's Wonderful toolchain – bit.ly/wonderful-ws Art is done with Aseprite, and the maps are made with Tiled. I created my own tools that export Tiled's maps and create data my game engine will understand. I use a Flash Masta to test on a WonderSwan Crystal.

WHEN WILL IT BE FINISHED?

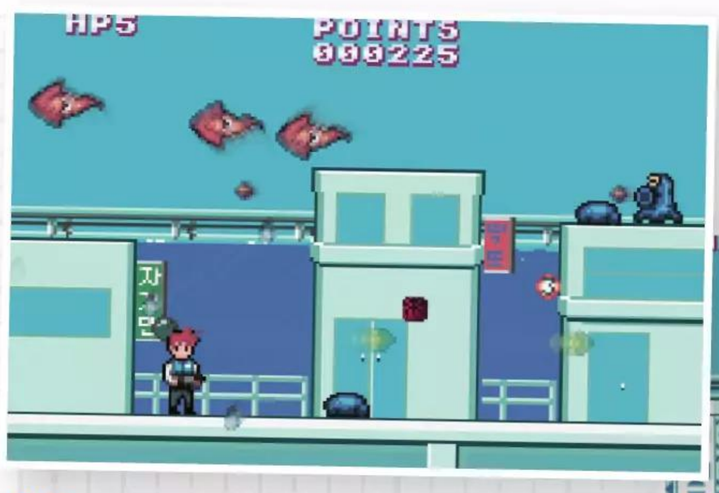
The game is pretty close to being finished. The engine is all there, the maps are all there, I just need to create a few more bosses and assets. I'm considering adding a few more maps and branching gameplay. Depending on how long some other things I'm waiting on take, I could finish the game as soon as a month or take as long as three or four months.

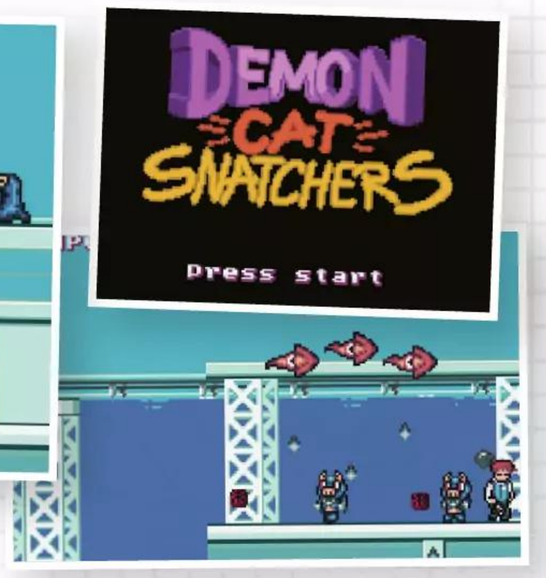
ARE YOU PLANNING A DIGITAL RELEASE, AND WILL THERE BE A PHYSICAL CARTRIDGE?

I'm really hoping I'll be able to do both.

HAVE YOU BEEN IMPRESSED BY ANY OTHER WONDERSWAN HOMEBREW GAMES?

There isn't much out there unless we're considering Wonder Witch stuff. There is a great *Freecell* game called *Wondercell* made by Joe Kennedy – bit.ly/wondercell-ws I'd catch myself playing that for hours when I was supposed to be working on my game.





<!--- [WONDERSWAN] DEFEATED ENEMIES DROP BONUS ICONS AND WEAPON UPGRADES THAT CAN BE COLLECTED. --->

DATABURST

MIGHTY STEEL FIGHTERS

<INFO FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC WITH 512K RAM EXPANSION CREDITS: AMSTRADGGP (MAITREJOE CODE & GRAPHICS, JACK MUSIC & SOUND, ROUDOUDOU SAMPLES) PRICE: €4.99 (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) WEB: BIT.LY/MIGHTYSF-CPC />

<BODY> **We have been looking forward to *Mighty Steel Fighters*, which was previously known as *Mighty Street Fighter* and lets you pick from one of eight global fighters to try and win the Mighty Steel Tournament.** The clever two-button/two-key layout allows for numerous kicks and punches, with timing determining their strength. Each fighter has special moves, performed by familiar inputs such as quarter-circles and charging by holding away and then pressing forward, which makes it feel very intuitive.

The title screen animations describe how to perform moves as it waits for you to select Training mode or one of the game's three difficulty levels: Fragile, Normal, or Boss. Defeat all seven opponents and you get to fight Thai boxer Tong Po for true glory. The recreations of the familiar backgrounds are well done but mostly static (with animated flames) and do not scroll left and right, which does narrows the play area. The different characters are recognisable in their new miniature forms and move fluidly. The music is very good too, with sampled speech adding to the atmosphere. What a shame then that it's one-player only and has only one (non-playable) boss. Despite the difficulty of pulling off some special moves, this is an enjoyable addition to the CPC catalogue if you have the hardware, but it may prove short-lived for very skilled players. </BODY>

SCORE: 85%

<!--- [AMSTRAD CPC] LEE IN THE WHITE ROBES UNLEASHES A FIREBALL AGAINST CHUCK IN THE RED GEAR (WHO COULD THEY BE?). --->

<!--- [AMSTRAD CPC] THE SELECT SCREEN INCLUDES A FAMILIAR ANIMATION SEQUENCE FROM ITS CAPCOM INSPIRATION. --->

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THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<!--- [C64] IMPRESSIVE SCREENS LIKE THIS WERE BUILT WITH SEUCK'S EDITING TOOLS, AND THERE IS ALSO ANIMATED DIALOGUE TO ENJOY. --->

<!--- [C64] PROTECT THE LARGE SPACESHIP FROM ENEMY FIRE SO IT CAN LAND ON PLANET MAGNAR. --->

CAPTAIN ISHTAR VS THE FEDERATION'S MOST WANTED

<INFO FORMAT: C64 (PAL ONLY, DISK & CARTRIDGE) CREDITS: ALF YNGVE (DESIGN, GRAPHICS, SOUND), RICHARD BAYLISS (MUSIC, ENHANCEMENTS), MARTIN PIPER (ENHANCEMENTS) PRICE: $3.99 OR MORE (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) / PHYSICAL TBC WEB: BIT.LY/ISHTAR2 />

<BODY> **Captain Ishtar tracks down three criminals in this multi-part game cleverly created with The Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit.** After a neat animated intro, including a playable bonus game, there are five separate loads (which need passwords for later levels). The game ranges from escorting a spaceship to safety, hoverboarding along dangerous roads, to flying over Fromachis 3 in an on-rails shooter before using your tank to pursue the Clone Gang. You'll also find yourself stopping the Cheesium depot from being raided in an *Operation Wolf*-style shooter, then having to gain clues to the location of the shapeshifter Nemor on the planet Basarre. While the multiple gameplay styles are ambitious, certain sections do feel stretched out. Gorgeous presentation screens, an animated ending, and a great soundtrack from Richard Bayliss still make this worth playing. </BODY>

SCORE: 87%

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] COMBAT RELIES ON TACTICAL POSITIONING AND TACTICS, WITH STATUS EFFECTS PROVING GOOD OR BAD. --->

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] THE BUILT-IN MAP IS DRAWN AS YOU PROGRESS, WITH HANDY REMINDERS OF YOUR CURRENT TASKS. --->

HAFOC TOR

<INFO FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM (48K & 128K VERSIONS) CREDITS: RED ZEBRA PRICE: NAME YOUR OWN PRICE (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) WEB: BIT.LY/HAFOCTOR />

<BODY> **The follow-up to *Wycheweald* (87%, RG246) sees Raedwulf cursed, which turns him into a werewolf every full moon!** Although powerful, you run the risk of him attacking your own party. Explore the realm in its first-person view (with a day/night cycle), interact with NPCs, find or buy items, and fight off the bad guys as you try to break the curse. The graphics are good, the various musical themes (on 128K) are short but well-made, and there is a significant challenge in this worthy sequel. </BODY>

SCORE: 88%

PROCESSING

<INTRO> MEGA DRIVE HORROR GAME THE BAGMAN PAYS HOMAGE TO THE CLASSIC SNES TITLE CLOCK TOWER </INTRO>

<BODY> **Developer Nathan Buckley is working in SGDK and Unity, drawing inspiration from, "Lots of horror narrative games, crossed with stealth and point-and-click mechanics!"** Nathan says, "My primary reason is to appease the little child version of me that's stuck in my head and get him a physical cart on his favourite console. I'm constructing it so it runs natively on Mega Drive/Genesis, PC, and Switch."

For modern platforms, Nathan is planning two versions of his game. "The Mega Drive version and a slightly enhanced version," he explains. "It's an opportunity to work with some voice actors, so I would love to have VO on the enhanced version along with other enhancements around sound. Graphics would stay the same beautiful 16-bit pixel art."

We're also intrigued by another project Nathan is working on. "I run a small indie studio with a friend. That studio is called Creature Cauldron, and we are working on our next game called *Star Gunners*, which he describes as *Zelda* with guns. It's got classic Nineties cartoon energy vibes in a beautiful, hand-textured, colourful style." It sounds great. </BODY>

<!--- [MEGA DRIVE] IN A GORE-FREE SCENE, PROTAGONIST ELOISE NEEDS TO BE QUIET AS SHE ENTERS THIS BUILDING. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

» [PlayStation 2] Tim didn't love EyeToy interruptions, so we've decided not to use his old screenshots.

TWO FOR JOY

The team looks back on Sony's all-conquering juggernaut

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

» [PlayStation 2] For Darran, no PS2 game is bigger than *Shadow Of The Colossus* (pun intended).

We double-checked the calendar to be sure, but it really has been 25 years since the most popular console of all time finally made it to shelves. So, there's only one thing to do – reminisce about the PlayStation 2.

NICK

I don't think I remember any console having more pre-launch hype than the PlayStation 2. What were your first impressions of the console?

DARRAN

The hype was ridiculous to be fair. I don't know about the Emotion Engine, but taking all the interest away from the Dreamcast certainly made me pretty emotional.

TIM

Mostly that the graphics were so much better. All the screenshots in the magazines looked amazing and I had to have one.

NICK

I'd seen the *Tekken* tech demo with Paul and Jin in a proper 3D arena, encircled by spectators, and *Tekken Tag Tournament* felt disappointing. The infinite floors didn't feel like they met the backgrounds nicely at all, and it was really jarring.

DARRAN

Wasn't there a story about the PS2 that if you Sellotaped 20 of them together it could nuke something and be used for war? I'm sure I reported on that nonsense in *games™*. The hype around it was stupid.

NICK

The Japanese government did restrict export for a while, yeah – you weren't allowed to take more than two consoles out of the country. They quickly walked that back though.

TIM

Does that explain why I didn't get one until about a year after the machine launched?

> "Devil May Cry absolutely blew me away. That's when I knew I had to own a PS2"
>
> DARRAN JONES

DARRAN

Maybe you were just unimpressed with the early games, Tim? I certainly was. *SSX*, *International Superstar Soccer* and *TimeSplitters* didn't impress me at all when my mate Carl brought his PS2 over.

TIM

Nah, it was because I couldn't afford it. Eventually a mate, who I was sharing a house with, and I scraped up the cash (including many bags of 20p pieces, which was a nightmare waiting for them to be counted at the shop) to buy one. We got *SSX Tricky*, *Gran Turismo 3*, *Tekken Tag Tournament* and eventually *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*.

DARRAN

My first 'wow' experience with the machine was seeing it at my cousin Martin's house. He showed me the Japanese version of *Final Fantasy X* which I didn't care for, but then he put on *Devil May Cry* and it absolutely blew me away. That's when I knew I had to own a PS2.

» [PlayStation 2] It's no surprise that Nick went straight for *WipEout* when he finally got a PS2.

NICK

We eventually got a PS2 as a DVD player for the house in the autumn of 2003. I picked up *WipEout Fusion* and a *WWE* game with it, but it wasn't until I got *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution* and *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* that I really started spending time with it.

DARRAN

I purchased mine in late-2001 with *GTA III*, whatever Tony Hawk's was out, *Capcom Vs SNK 2* and *Devil May Cry* that had just come out. Sadly, the PAL version of *DMC* was atrociously bad compared to the Japanese version. I was absolutely gutted.

TIM

I still gave *Devil May Cry* a cracking review in the entertainment mag I worked on in Belfast, not knowing about the Japanese version and the PAL version's issues. I flipping loved that game.

DARRAN

Mate, it was like Dante was wading through treacle compared to the original. It's still a great game, but man, that's a bad PAL version. I imported a US copy shortly afterwards.

NICK

I didn't know about the issues, so I ended up buying the PAL game too. Our PS2 being in the living room meant that we played more of the casual and family friendly stuff though, like EyeToy games and *Guitar Hero*. Did you guys end up dipping into that side of the library?

DARRAN

Yup, loved the window washing game and *Guitar Hero* was a lot of fun. My PS2 was a *Rez* machine for a very long time as most of my new games at the time were purchased for Xbox.

TIM

I did review an EyeToy game for *Play*, but the production editor kept popping into frame and disrupting everything. I eventually asked him to write half the review, but all I got from him was, "It's bloody brilliant!" It wasn't even quite brilliant!

DARRAN

You've reminded me of a review I did for *games™*, Tim. I reviewed *Gradius V* and gave it a nine, because it's incredible. It was bumped down to a seven and now it's rightly hailed as one of the best horizontal shooters around. If we used GIFs I'd pull out Holt's Vindication one from *Brooklyn Nine Nine*. So what one game defined the system for you?

» [PlayStation 2] *Devil May Cry* made a big impression on all of us, even with a poor 50Hz version.

NICK

It's an odd choice, but *Mr Moskeeto* embodies everything I want in a PS2 game. It's weird, it's exclusive, and it's the kind of game publishers would never make physical copies of today – the cowards.

TIM

You'll hate this Darran, but *Final Fantasy X*. Massive RPG with voice acting and so much good stuff to do… and some really annoying bits too. I think I completed it three times, and messed about with a cheat disc that I think came from *P2*.

DARRAN

Very good, Tim. I'd have to go with *Shadow Of The Colossus*. It pushed the PS2 to its absolute limits and actually made me *feel* things. Who knows, maybe the Emotion Engine was real after all… ✱

» [PlayStation 2] *Final Fantasy X* didn't impress Darran, but it's the console-defining game for Tim.

» [PlayStation 2] Namco's tech demo suggested that *Tekken*'s PS2 debut would be rather different from what it was.

» [PlayStation 2] Nick tends to favour the PS2's more offbeat offerings, like *Mr Moskeeto*.

READERS REACT

What's your favourite PlayStation 2 game?

Kara Jane Adams
A little obvious, but it's *Gradius V*. It's everything a sequel to a long-running franchise should be, and as pure as gaming gets.

Llama King
The Warriors. I love the movie and this game just brings to life the atmosphere from the movie and the gameplay is spot on.

Tam
Hitman: Blood Money. Was it the best? No – it was janky as hell! But I don't think I've ever replayed a game so much, trying to find all the different ways for Agent 47 to kill off a target. Such a fun sandbox to play in and A New Life has to be included in any classic levels discussion.

Smitty
God Of War II. I feel like before that game I'd never experienced such a spectacle in gaming. The orchestral score and graphics were mind-blowing to me back then.

Chun Wah Kong
Ico. It kinda came out from nowhere for me, as I remember playing the demo multiple times at E3. I've never seen characters with so much life. The visuals and atmosphere were subtle, stunning and haunting at the same time. Perfect blend of puzzle solving, action and adventure. Game of the generation.

Antony Longmore
Fahrenheit by Quantic Dream was incredible for its time and still holds up to this day. The story grabs you from the very beginning. One of the most explosive starts to a game ever.

Skyblaze
.Hack//Infection introduced me to the *.hack* franchise, and subsequently inspired the plot of a TTRPG that I've been running for many years.

MYST+
Picking just one from such a vast library feels impossible, but the one that came to mind before all others… *Aeon Flux*. Is it the best game ever? Hell no. Did I have a lot of fun playing it as a kid? Hell yeah. PS Pink PS2 and Yellow PS2 are girlfriends. No, I will not elaborate.

Darth Kafka
Gregory Horror Show. A unique, grotesque, bizarre, badass, original, risky, exclusive and, above all, different game.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

NES POWER SET

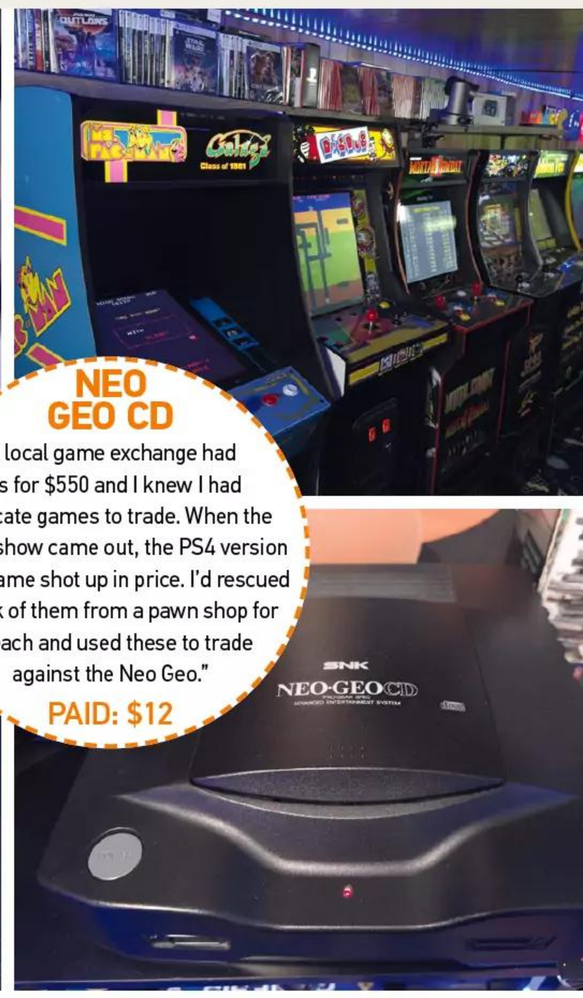
"I had been looking around for a clean box for a few years. Finally, I found one in a hobby shop and negotiated with the owner. This will stay in my collection and is one of my favourite pieces!"

PAID: $75

TURBOEXPRESS

"I found this one which had just been re-capped, had an upgraded screen to an LCD and included an Everdrive Pro. The owner knew I was looking for it and gave me a great deal on it."

PAID: $650



NEO GEO CD

"A local game exchange had this for $550 and I knew I had duplicate games to trade. When the *Fallout* show came out, the PS4 version of the game shot up in price. I'd rescued a stack of them from a pawn shop for $1 each and used these to trade against the Neo Geo."

PAID: $12

FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

It's all about the next generation for this collector

BIO

NAME:
Stephen Heywood

LOCATION:
Hubbard, Ohio

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
$48,598.56

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
NES

FAVOURITE GAME:
Castlevania II: Simon's Quest

YOUTUBE:
@thetechbuzz

Stephen Heywood's love for gaming started back in the Eighties after his father introduced them to him.

"I first started gaming when I was seven," Stephen remembers. "My dad brought out his Atari 2600 and Intellivision for me and my brother to play. He loved playing bowling on the Intellivision, and that was a way we could get him to play with us." This started a trend, and Stephen got his own console a little later. "My parents saw we took to those systems and bought us the NES Power Pad set for Christmas. I guess they figured we could get some exercise while playing videogames."

Years later Stephen started to get back into his old games and started to collect. "Collecting started in 2018 when my son was old enough to play, and it was something I could share with him," he explains. "My daughter also enjoyed playing games, so it was only natural to introduce them to games that I played when growing up. That quickly snowballed into wanting to get the systems I never had as a kid. I got excited at the challenge of trying to find these systems, purchasing them at a good price, and then the satisfaction of playing them with my kids."

For all the new systems Stephen has tried he still holds the NES as his favourite. "I think the NES is so important because it was the first real system that was mine. A lot of memories were made with friends and family with that system. Most of my friends had an NES, so we would go play games at their house, learn new tricks, and teach each other new things. To me, that's where my videogame memories stem from, the NES."

Stephen has since found some bargains, but what was the best one? "It has to be 65 NES games for $80," Stephen says with excitement. "There was a local game store that wasn't doing well, and I was a regular there. They called me up and asked if I wanted some cheap filler NES titles. Well, since I'm going for the complete North American collection, I obliged. Each game was roughly valued between $7-$15 so I think I did pretty well."

We also asked Stephen where he sees his collection going in the future. "After I complete the NES collection, I think I will try my hand at the Sega Genesis. That was another favourite system of mine. The problem I'm going to face is room. I've already thought of some ideas to open the fronts of my arcades and use them for shelving for games or systems with display lights. I think it could be an interesting presentation."

When asked what grail item he'd like to add Stephen looks to his trusty NES again. "The item would have to be the *Nintendo World Championships 1990* cart. There is so much history with that cart. I have a reproduction one, but growing up, I saw the tryouts advertised and wished I could be good enough to compete. You don't even have to be a Nintendo fan to agree that it would be a crown jewel in any collection."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com retrogamermag.bsky.social

PS4 KIOSK

"I found it on Facebook marketplace. It didn't have everything, but I managed to find everything I needed to complete it on eBay and Facebook marketplace."

PAID: $250

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

NES GOLF THE M82 EDITION

■ "A seller at the conventions I attend sold it to me. The sticker on the front makes it rare, otherwise, it's just *Golf* for NES. There may be only 20 of these in the world."

PAID: $200

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

PLAYSTATION 2

Sony's iconic console is the biggest selling and that reflects on its availability today. Loose standard systems cost as little as **£20,** while minty boxed examples cost over **£100.** Keen shoppers should look for bundles with lots of games included.

BUBBLE BOBBLE

Taito's excellent arcade title plays great on the Master System with box copies costing **£25,** and mint ones heading towards **£50.** The recent reissue of this classic is also rising in price.

TURRICAN II: THE FINAL FIGHT

This shooter doesn't appear for sale often, finding a good-condition PC version will cost **£100.** However, those just looking to play should check out the recent Switch and PS4 compilations.

THE LEGACY: REALM OF TERROR

Buying a complete copy costs up to **£100,** although copies can be picked up for **£30** if the condition isn't important. Alternatively, GOG has a download available for only **£2.50.**

DINO CRISIS

Capcom's dino survival classic remains popular on PlayStation and that is reflected in the price. Complete copies go for over **£30,** while very good condition ones can hit as high as **£70.**

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG: THE OFFICIAL GAME OF THE MOVIE

While Kong himself may be huge and commands lots of attention, don't expect the price of the game of the movie to cost more than **£5.** That's a monstrous bargain.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: CHINATOWN WARS

Rockstar Leed's brilliant *GTA* spin-off can be picked up for as little as **£10,** although most copies sold have hit over **£20** at times, especially if the cool poster is included.

NODES OF YESOD

This classic Speccy game pops up regularly with complete copies selling for about **£10,** while very good condition examples usually head towards the **£20** mark.

HOW MUCH?!

TWISTED METAL

You would've thought a popular PS1 title like *Twisted Metal* would be quite cheap to pick up, and in the main, it's for a normal copy. However, this sealed NTSC-U long box version recently sold for a whopping **£3,800.**

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

STEAM DECK FUN

Why Darran's going off physical games

A couple of years ago I was in a rather dark place and I spoke about my struggles with mental health and how I felt my constant need to acquire games was linked to it. I've had a lot of self-reflection in that time, learned my youngest daughter is autistic and that I share virtually all her autistic traits as well (including a few of my own like stimming).

Retrospectively, looking back at the way things have played out in both of our lives makes a lot more sense and it's certainly given me a better understanding of my intense approach to collecting and why I become so laser-focussed on anything that catches my interest. I'm once again thinking of trimming back my collection, but this time it's not because I'm depressed, I've simply fallen in love with Valve's Steam Deck.

Since picking up Valve's machine last November there's never been a day I've not played it. Will I get bored of it? Possibly, but as long as I can play the likes of *Dave The Diver* and *Ninja Gaiden 2 Black* in bed and pick up games for next to nothing it will probably take some time to happen. The Steam Deck has really changed my mind in how I view the collecting of games and my Switch has been the first system to feel the effects. I absolutely adore Nintendo's console and had over 300 physical games for it, but it has one huge issue for me – a lot of its third-party releases are not very well optimised.

There is something galling about paying £35 or more for a game that barely manages to hit a consistent 30fps when I can buy a Steam version for a couple of pounds that can hit up to 90fps on the actual deck. And yes, it's obviously not a fair comparison in terms of power, and yes, there's a possibility that these games could very well receive upgrades when the Switch 2 comes out, but I'm not convinced that will happen. After all, if Nintendo can sell you a full-priced *Donkey Kong Country Returns* with minimal updates for a third time, it's unlikely to offer game updates for free, but we'll see.

What I am convinced about is that I don't feel the huge need for physical games like I once did. They still bring me plenty of enjoyment of course, but my collecting interests have diversified quite a bit lately and I get a lot more satisfaction from gazing at my 1/6th scale figures than I do from rows of videogame spines. I've even been in touch with some online resellers about selling off a huge chunk of my collection as well, but currently, something holds me back.

I'm well aware that the traits I share with my daughter mean I'm incredibly fickle when it comes to where I put my attention, which is part of the reason I'm holding fire, but let's face it we're also limited by time and if I'm putting all my spare time in Valve's new hardware, that doesn't leave me much time to enjoy my other systems. Add in the fact that so many of my Xbox 360 and PS3 games run significantly better on Valve's device and it becomes hard to justify keeping my physical third-party games for those systems, they simply run much better on the Steam Deck.

> "I don't feel the huge need for games like I did a few years ago"
>
> **DARRAN JONES**

Emulation is another thing I'm interested in testing on Valve's machine, but it's something I haven't gotten around to yet. One of the downsides of the device is that I do find it quite challenging to set things up in its back end, so the idea of emulation is rather daunting (I've not added the updated version of *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast* yet for the very same reason). It's absolutely something I'm going to do and I'd imagine systems like the PSP, PS2, Mega Drive and SNES are the first ones I look at. I've just been putting it off.

I've actually been considering sticking my games in the loft just to see if I do miss the idea of having them easily accessible and if I don't feel the desire to play anything old I can then look at selling them at one of the popular game markets. I certainly won't be getting rid of my NTSC N64 collection or my Japanese Saturn collection for that matter, but I don't feel connected to my other systems like I once did (and yes, that includes the Mega Drive). That's enough rambling, back to the Steam Deck. ✱

PERMANENT FIXTURES

THE GAMES THAT ARE UNLIKELY TO LEAVE MY STEAM DECK

HALLS OF TORMENT
This is a cross between *Vampire Survivors* and *Diablo* and I've already sunk far too much time into it.

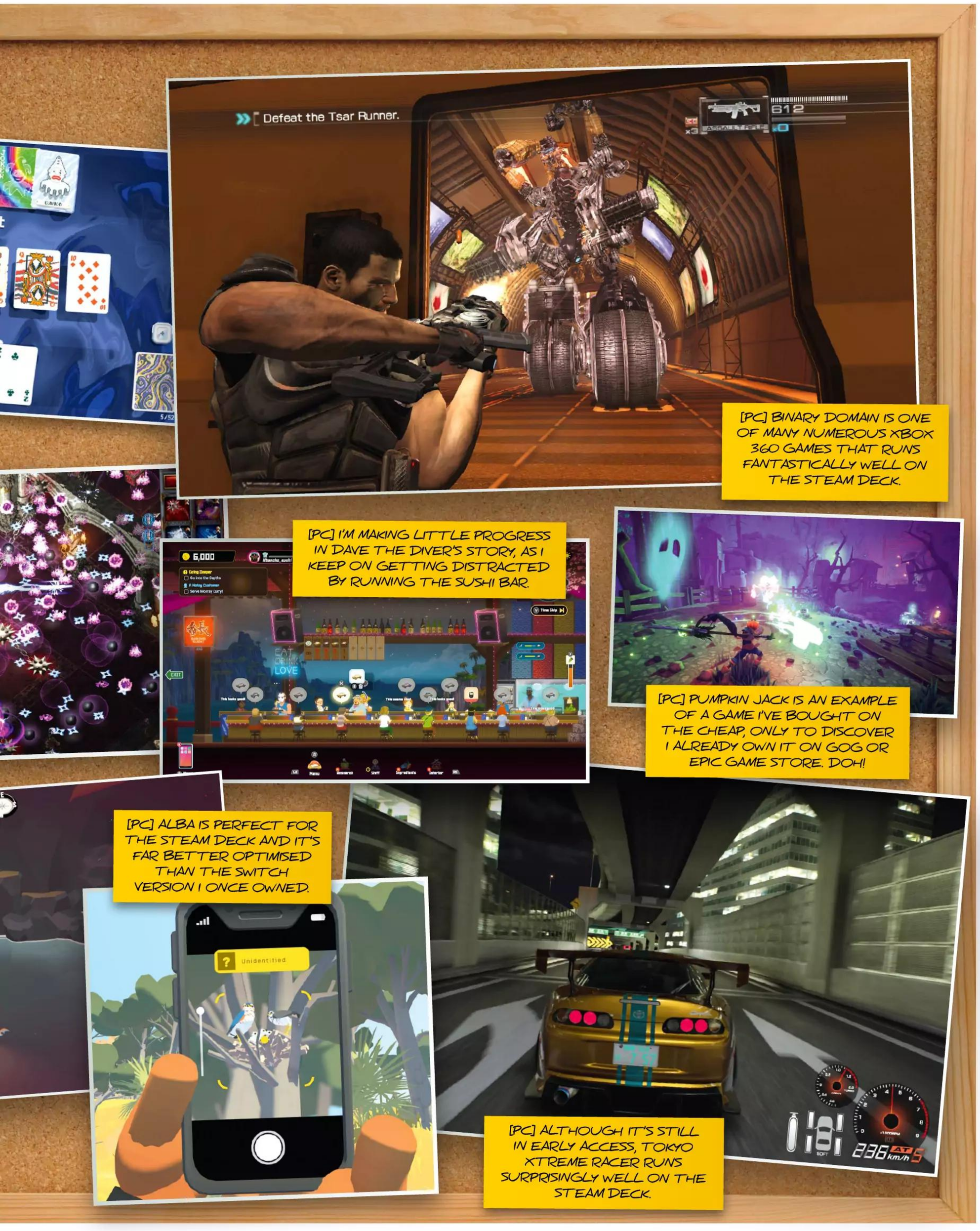
DAVE THE DIVER
This clever blend of deep-sea diving and managing a sushi bar has kept me glued to the deck.

BALATRO
This is another game that you say you'll have a quick game of and then it's 2am in the morning. It's a worryingly addictive game.

ALBA
This is a charming nature-themed game with plenty of birds to spot. It's short, but that means it doesn't take long to complete.

SPEC OPS: THE LINE
This is one of the best war games that I've played and it runs like an utter treat on Valve's handheld.

[PC] IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR AN INCREDIBLE TIME-WASTER, YOU CAN'T GO WRONG WITH BALATRO.
[PC] NO, IT'S NOT A MAGIC EYE PICTURE, BUT THE FIENDISHLY TIME-SAPPING HALLS OF TORMENT.
[PC] DREDGE IS ANOTHER PHYSICAL SWITCH GAME I OWN THAT I'LL MOST LIKELY SELL DUE TO ITS POOR PERFORMANCE.


Defeat the Tsar Runner.
612
[PC] BINARY DOMAIN IS ONE OF MANY NUMEROUS XBOX 360 GAMES THAT RUNS FANTASTICALLY WELL ON THE STEAM DECK.
[PC] I'M MAKING LITTLE PROGRESS IN DAVE THE DIVER'S STORY, AS I KEEP ON GETTING DISTRACTED BY RUNNING THE SUSHI BAR.
[PC] PUMPKIN JACK IS AN EXAMPLE OF A GAME I'VE BOUGHT ON THE CHEAP, ONLY TO DISCOVER I ALREADY OWN IT ON GOG OR EPIC GAME STORE. DOH!
[PC] ALBA IS PERFECT FOR THE STEAM DECK AND IT'S FAR BETTER OPTIMISED THAN THE SWITCH VERSION I ONCE OWNED.
[PC] ALTHOUGH IT'S STILL IN EARLY ACCESS, TOKYO XTREME RACER RUNS SURPRISINGLY WELL ON THE STEAM DECK.
Unidentified

ME AND MY STEAM DECK

Readers weigh in on Valve's handheld

Stuart Gipp

I love spending hundreds of hours precisely configuring and arranging an enormous range of emulation options for absolute peak aesthetic and performance, then never actually launching any of it and just playing *The Binding Of Isaac* for a thousand hours instead.

Nic McConnell

I'm not a PC gamer – I don't like sitting in front of a computer if I'm not getting paid to do so! – and the Steam Deck lets me enjoy all the games I'd otherwise be missing out on. Without the Deck I'd be living a life not knowing how great *UFO 50* is!

Retro Game Den

Aside from it being an excellent emulation handheld, the Steam Deck really shines when revisiting Xbox 360 and PS3 games. They tend to run really well, and because they're older, they are usually quite cheap, allowing me to catch up with a lot of games that I missed when they were new.

the-poppies

I bought a Steam Link years ago so I could play games on the couch, but it meant setting the game up on the PC first so it can be streamed. Having the Steam Deck negates this as the game is downloaded to it. I have played more games since having the Deck than I otherwise would have.

My Linux Rig

I like it cause it plays all my hentai games perfectly.

Steve Hall

I've found myself picking up games I've had in my account for years and never touched. I have all my favourite emulated games on there, and I can sit in the living room playing whilst my wife watches TV programs I can't stand.

Ken Harrison

I had one, but it gave me battery anxiety and made me realise I don't like playing on a handheld device. Sold it. Regret it.

MAILBAG

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WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of one of our classic retro books from our archives. Good luck everyone!

STAR LETTER

A HIDDEN SANCTUARY

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I wanted to take a moment to share my personal journey and how videogames have profoundly impacted my life, especially in light of my recent autism diagnosis.

Growing up, videogames were more than just entertainment; they were a sanctuary for me. The vibrant worlds and engaging stories provided a sense of belonging that I often struggled to find elsewhere. As I navigate the complexities of autism, I've discovered that these cherished games from my childhood serve as both a nostalgic escape and a powerful tool for emotional regulation.

Inspired by this connection, I have started creating short video essays on YouTube, delving into some of my favourite games. Through these videos, I aim to celebrate the artistry and impact of these games while sharing my experiences and insights.

I believe that videogames can be a beacon of hope and empowerment for many individuals, especially those navigating the challenges of autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions. They foster self-expression, creativity and emotional resilience. I hope to inspire others to embrace their love for gaming, just as I have.

Thank you for providing a platform that celebrates the magic of videogames. I look forward to continuing my journey and sharing my love for gaming with others.

Warm regards,

Al Kidd

Thanks so much for sharing your journey with us, Al. Darran has his own challenges in this area and it's brave to see you willing to share your journey with us and other readers. Hopefully the book we'll be sending you will give you some inspiration for future videos.

» You can find Al's channel by searching for Mr Flumps: Retro Gamer on Youtube.

A MARATHON READ

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I've subscribed since issue 194 and up until just over a year ago I regularly smashed through the mag, cover to cover. I'm a bit compulsive like that.

One obsession that I almost lost my way with was my reading of **Retro Gamer**. For one reason or another I just never found the time, and by December 2024, I had accumulated 12 unread issues going back to issue 256 with Crash Bandicoot on the cover. My wife said it wasn't a big deal. It's retro. It won't ever go out of date. But the obsessor in me kicked in. The New Year came and a resolution was set. It is Tuesday, 3 February 2025 and since the turn of the year I have read the 12 stagnant issues and just finished number 268, the January Issue, which was on my beloved Mega Drive, which felt suitably significant.

Retro Gamer brings me great joy and for over 6 years and 75 issues I can say it's one collection that I am unlikely to ever sell.

PS. I've now got nothing to actually read, can you get a move on with 269 please!

Joe Dunn

That's an impressive feat, Joe. We're glad that you've finally caught up and hope you enjoyed issue 269.

CAPCOM FOREVER

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

What a fantastic read your Capcom's Greatest Fighting game awards made. As someone old enough to have been around when *Street Fighter* was everywhere I always enjoy reflecting on the quality of Capcom's beat-'em-ups. They remain my favourite developer due to the excellence of their fighting games and I firmly believe Capcom mastered the genre.

It was also refreshing to read Mr Biffo's take on the zeitgeist of

» [Arcade] If you want to get good at fighting games, watch the masters play the likes of *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*.

» Here's the pile of issues Joe mentions. Hopefully he's enjoyed them!

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Street Fighter/Mortal Kombat etc – I was fortunate enough to have a twin brother to fight against and practice special moves on. I fully appreciate that modern one-on-one fighters can look impossible to grasp, but would urge anyone with a passing interest to start with the older *Street Fighters* and give their more accessible gameplay a go. Alternatively, explore watching Evo or the Capcom Cup to see how the real professionals play! Thanks again.
Peter Watts

We're glad you enjoyed the feature, Peter. We may try a similar approach with another developer down the line.

SNATCHED MEMORIES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I greatly enjoyed a real retro rush reading the Ultimate Guide on *Snatcher* in Load 263. Now, I have to confess that I've never actually played *Snatcher*! However, I once felt as if I had, thanks to a big in-depth showcase feature on the Mega-CD

» [Mega-CD] Robert found certain images of *Snatcher* quite grisly as a youngster.

version of the game back in the Nineties that the official UK *Sega Magazine* published. Your article immediately took me back to those childhood days, and all the informative sidebars talking about the different versions of the game went beyond them too.

But the talk about censorship is amusing in retrospect: the infamous scene of the decapitated Jean absolutely terrified me when I was young and I could only read the original *Sega Magazine* article with my hand resting over the awful grisly screenshot! Nowadays I wouldn't be satisfied until every gory crimson pixel was splattered all over the screen for glorious schlock edginess. There's probably a tale about the loss of childhood innocence there!
Yours sincerely,
Robert Frazer

We're glad you enjoyed the *Snatcher* retrospective, Robert. Hopefully the included picture won't put you off.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Soundtrack

This month we've been discussing one of the PS2's best soundtracks which Rockstar handily released in CD format. Nick and Andy both enjoy the hard rock sounds of V-Rock, while Tim enjoys listening to Flash FM because one of INXS' best songs is on it . Darran picked up the physical CD set late last year and regularly listens to Emotion 98.3 and Flash FM.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite single-screen arcade game?

» [Arcade] *Bubble Bobble* was a popular choice with readers, and rightly so, it's brilliant.

Robin
I recently discovered *Tumblepop* on the Evercade. My youngest and I love playing through it together.

matt sephton
I'm going to go with *Flicky* (1984, Sega). Whilst there is camera movement the whole screen is always visible and nothing is hidden. My own arcade machine of this game is currently on loan at Arcade Club, Bury. Go play it!

David8
For me it's going to be *Mr Do!*, *Roc'n Rope* and *Port Man*.

Allan Lear
Chaos. Eight wizards enter, one wizard leaves. Dragons may be illusory.

FatPlumber
Donkey Kong. One of the originals and 44 years later, it's still one of the best.

Paul Cranner
Bubble Bobble. Simple to play, highly addictive (especially when playing co-op) and a catchy tune. A timeless classic.

40oz Gorilla
I'm probably going to be the only person who says *Buster Bros*. Something about the worldwide aesthetic and all the bubble sprites flying around made it…

James Swaby
Smash TV. The arcade version is so bloody difficult though. I love the ridiculous amount of prizes you can win.

Ben Bulbeck
Bubble Bobble is single-screen perfection. The gradual difficulty curve, the cute characters, pixel-perfect controls, and THAT music. Come on, you can hear it now.

Chris Widnes
I always had a soft spot for *Blood Brothers*. By no means the greatest game, but it was in a holiday camp I used to go to and I can still hear the sound of the machine gun in my mind.

Stacey King
It can only be *Bubble Bobble*. I first discovered this on the ST and it remains one of my favourite games. I first found the arcade machine in an arcade on Minehead seafront. The skills I learned on the Atari ST translated well to the arcade. I have since bought it on the PS1 and Switch.

Alessandro Perlini
It's a tie between *Tumblepop* and *Snow Bros*. The real challenge was not in their difficulty but in learning all the tricks to make their journeys as fun as possible, speeding through the levels while gathering loads of points!

Jason
Super Off-Road. Brilliant racer. Jostling with friends around the track and the screen.

Lorenzo
Lode Runner. I spent many afternoons with my cousin trying to finish that game in the arcade. A legendary game.

retro GAMER

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Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars

THE DRUGS DO WORK

» NINTENDO DS » 2009 » ROCKSTAR LEEDS

As good as they are, I've never really been a fan of the 3D *Grand Theft Auto* games (although I do really enjoy *Vice City*). I completely understand why they're so popular and I do think they're incredibly ambitious games with a clever knack of accessing the zeitgeist in a way few other games can, but they've just never really grabbed my attention in the way they have with millions of other gamers and that actually makes me a bit sad.

And yet, one of my favourite DS games is actually a *GTA* game, the rather brilliant *Chinatown Wars*, which was eventually ported to systems like the PSP and iOS and probably deserves a HD makeover as well, because it's so insanely enjoyable.

Created by Rockstar Leeds, the creative minds behind the ridiculously good isometric GBA port of *Max Payne*, it's a staggeringly deep game that follows the trials and tribulations of Huang Lee, who is left for dead after attempting to deliver a family heirloom to his uncle. It's a solid story with plenty of twists and turns, but that's not why I enjoy *Chinatown Wars* so much.

It's the interactivity and the sheer amount of chaos you can cause in the city that makes *Chinatown Wars* so much fun to play. Rockstar Leeds took every aspect of the DS into consideration when crafting its game, meaning you feel incredibly connected to Huang Lee's world as you play. From whistling into the microphone to hail a taxi, to frantically tapping your DS' screen to break the windows of the car you're trapped in, there's an energy to *Chinatown Wars* that you feel as well as witness.

As enjoyable as its story is and as fun as the game's many interactive minigames are, the true triumph of *Chinatown Wars* is its wonderfully deep drug dealing side hustle which I found more addictive (yes, I know what I've done here) than completing the main story line. I racked up hours scouring the streets of Liberty City for the best deals and would receive a little wave of excitement whenever I realised I could make a good return on my investment. I'm not sure what that says about me as a person, but try Rockstar Leeds' game for yourself and let me know.

ENDGAME

THE CLIFFHANGER: EDWARD RANDY

» Before Lara Croft and Nathan Drake, Data East gave the public Edward Randy – the one man standing between a fascist regime and the weapon of mass destruction that they seek. With whip in hand, can the young adventurer defeat the baddies and get home in time for dinner? It's time to skip to the end...

01

» Edward emerges as the victor of a deadly battle on top of a plane in mid-air, sending his evil foe plummeting to his doom. The battle is finally over, with Edward surviving against all the odds.

02

» Having beaten the baddies, all Edward can think of is returning home to Charlotte. The scientist's granddaughter will be free at last, safe from the threat of persecution by the military.

03

» Something is immediately off when he gets home, though. He has no idea what until one familiar voice speaks his name, immediately freezing the air and paralysing Edward with fear.

04

» Edward doesn't even have to look behind him to know what he's forgotten – he was supposed to take his girlfriend Jennifer on a date today, for the first time in months. Once again, he has stood her up, and there will inevitably be consequences that he will have to suffer.

05

» Edward's transgression earns him a mighty slap from his rather displeased partner. Ease up on him, Jennifer – it's not like he was knocking back rounds at the pub. Doesn't saving the world from a fascist-controlled weapon of mass destruction count for anything these days?

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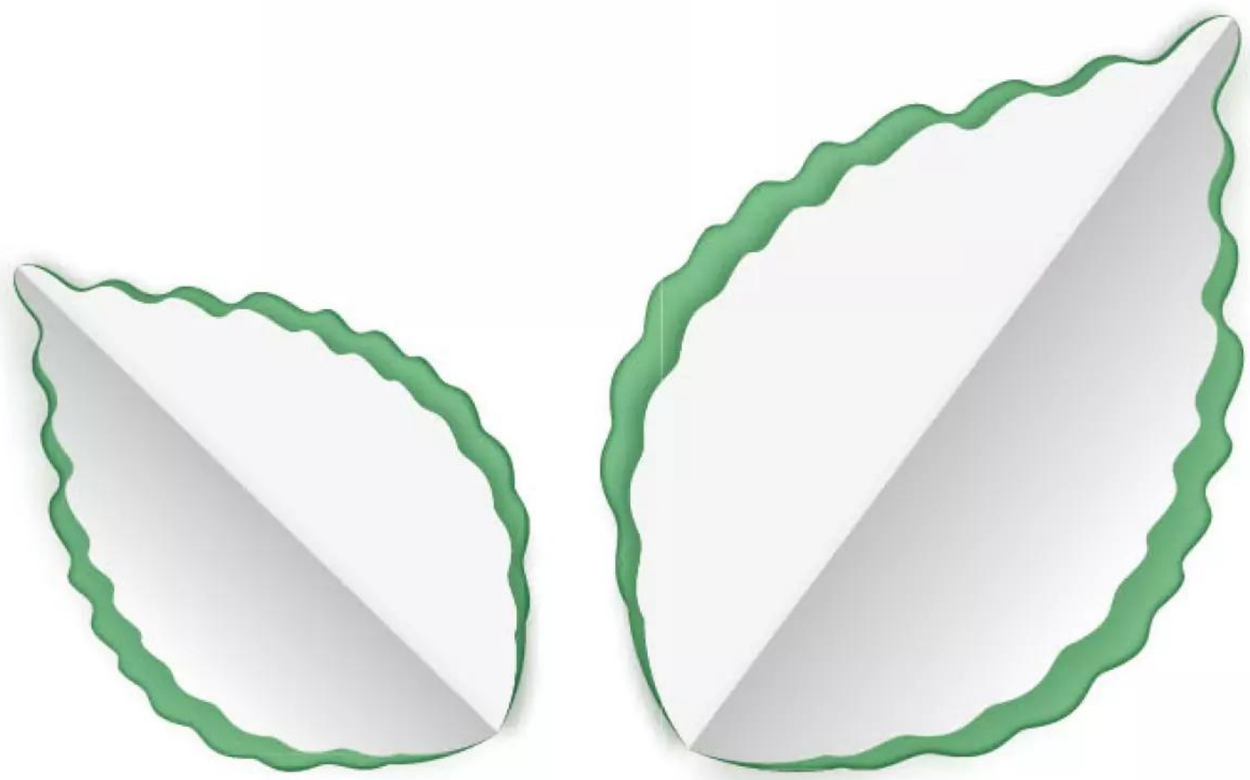

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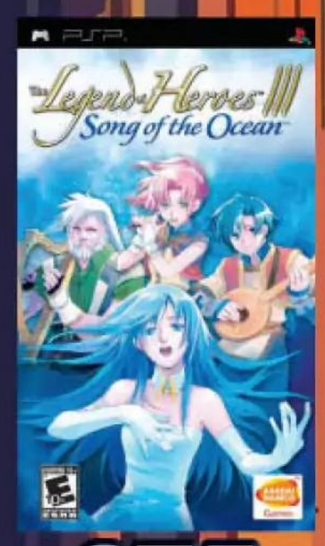

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retro GAMER

THE MINI

PlayStation 2

COMPANION

THE MINI PLAYSTATION 2 COMPANION

It's quite likely that no videogame console will ever be as successful as the PlayStation 2. Fuelled by all the hype around its Emotion Engine and supported by some of the biggest names in the industry, it helped destroy Sega as a console maker, spawned numerous killer franchises like *God Of War*, *Devil May Cry* and *Ratchet & Clank* and houses some of the best games of all time. Sony ended up selling over 160 million PS2 consoles, meaning plenty of gamers have fond memories of it and its success meant that a huge number of games are available for it as well.

60 of those games will be covered in this book and every single one of those that we've covered is a title we feel deserves to be in every PlayStation 2 owner's collection. You'll find well-known classics and more interesting oddities, but what you won't find is multiple games from the same franchise. After all, PS2's library is as wide as it is diverse and while you could easily put every *Grand Theft Auto* game or both *God Of War* games in a list like this we've decided not to – that way we can champion as many different games as possible. We hope you enjoy reading through this book as much as we enjoyed creating it.

20

5

29

10

24

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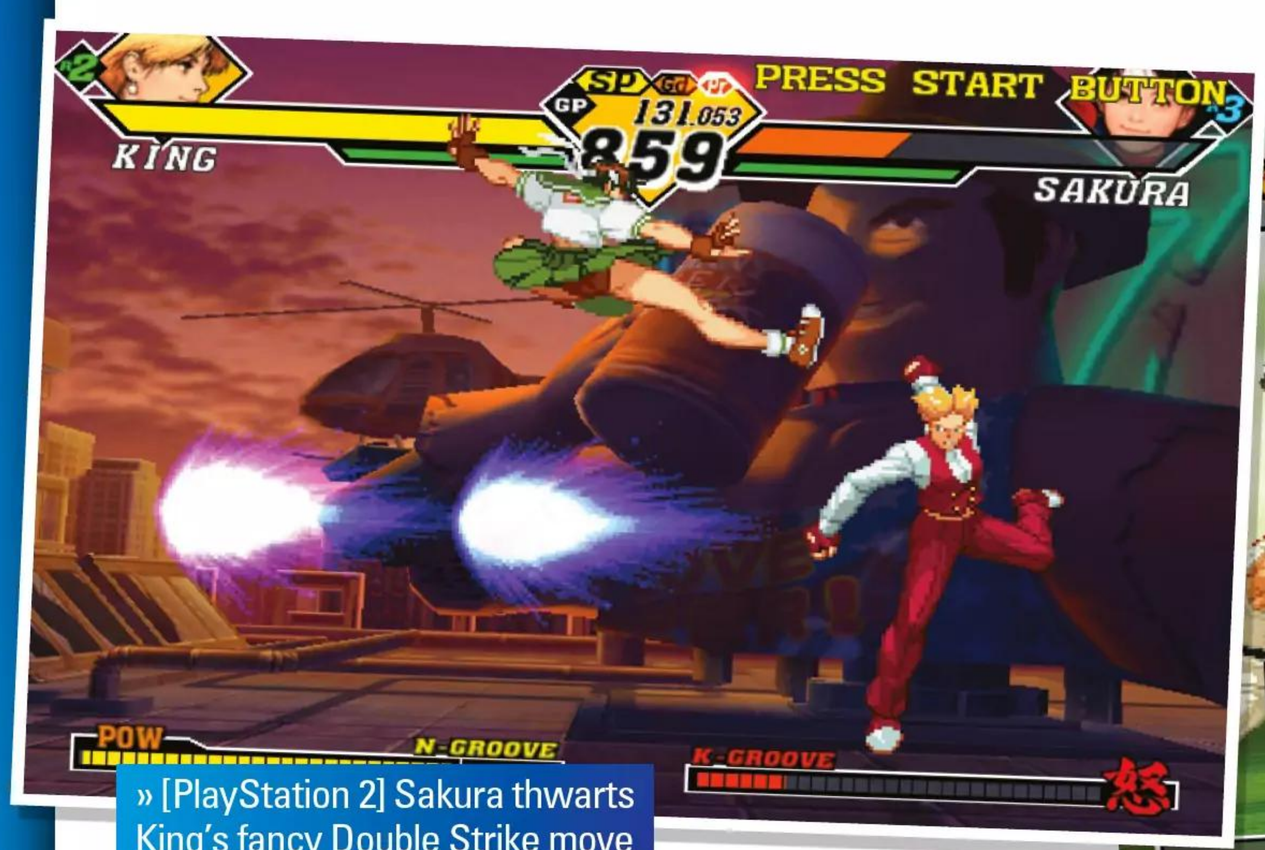
OKAMI 2006

ARTISTRY AND ADVENTURE ALIGN

Though we can appreciate the pursuit of realism in videogame graphics, a strong artistic direction can help a game to age with grace, and this fantastic game from Clover Studio is all the proof you need. *Okami*'s storyline draws major inspiration from Japanese folklore, and the cel-shaded graphics are designed to resemble Japanese sumi-e art. It was a beautiful game when it launched, and Capcom hasn't messed with it in subsequent re-releases as the effect is just as striking today.

Okami is much more than just an incredibly pretty face, however. Underneath the artful exterior, the game is arguably the closest equivalent to Nintendo's excellent *Zelda* series that PlayStation 2 owners have access to, with a similar mixture of exploration, puzzle-solving and combat. You play as the sun goddess Amaterasu, travelling the land in the form of a wolf in order to remove curses and restore the world to normality, using your Celestial Brush to perform miracles.

» [PlayStation 2] It's not just thick, inky outlines – few games use colour like this.



» [PlayStation 2] Sakura thwarts King's fancy Double Strike move with a simple jump.

CAPCOM VS SNK 2: MARK OF THE MILLENNIUM 2001 2001

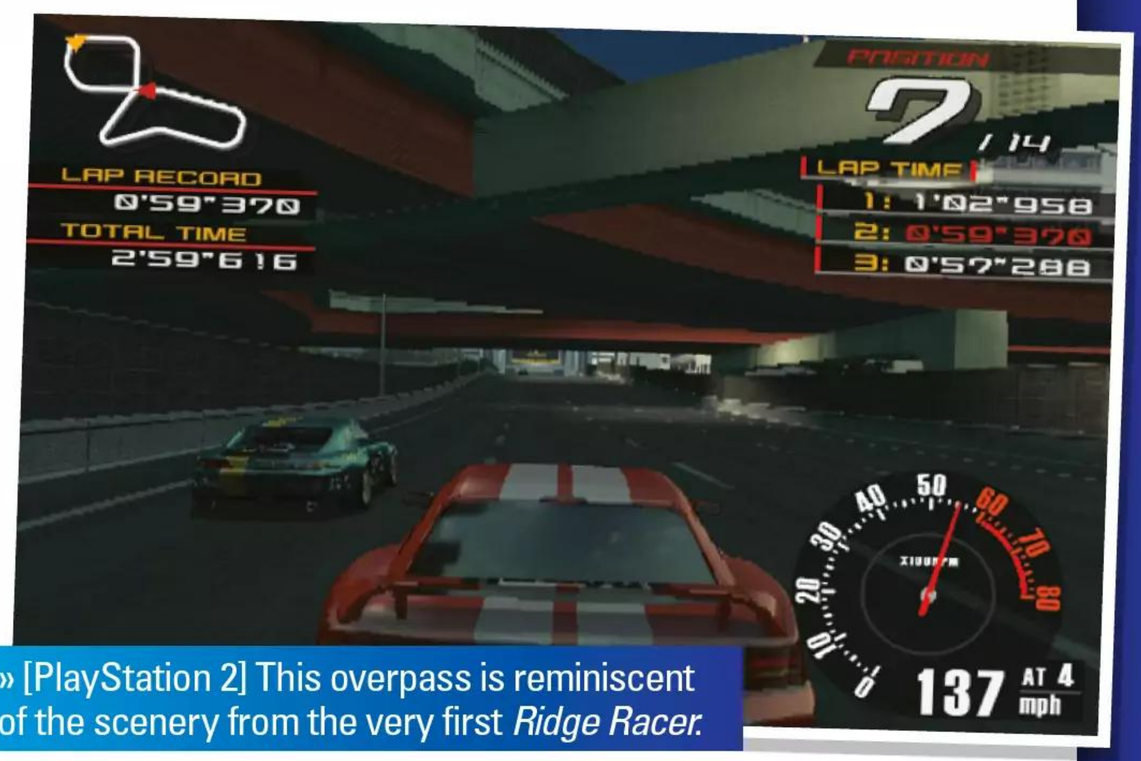
CAPCOM'S CRUCIAL CROSSOVER

This early release for the console held its own against the surging popularity of 3D fighting games, and includes almost every feature a fan of 2D fighting games could want. An all-star cast taking in fan favourites from *Street Fighter*, *Darkstalkers*, *The King Of Fighters*, *Samurai Shodown* and more? Check. Six different fighting systems, allowing you to mix and match mechanics? Check. A new sprite for Morrigan? Well, no, but asking would just be greedy.

RIDGE RACER V 2000

A DREAM DRIVE

Namco's arcade racer was a part of the PlayStation 2 launch line-up and was criticised upon release for failing to innovate, but don't let that put you off. Divorce the game from the weight of expectation that accompanied it upon release, and it's much easier to appreciate as the finely crafted experience that it is. It doesn't break boundaries, but it's hard to care as it looks good, sounds good and handles like a dream.



» [PlayStation 2] This overpass is reminiscent of the scenery from the very first *Ridge Racer*.

» [PlayStation 2] Strong combat mechanics help *Rogue Galaxy* to stand out from the RPG pack.

ROGUE GALAXY 2005

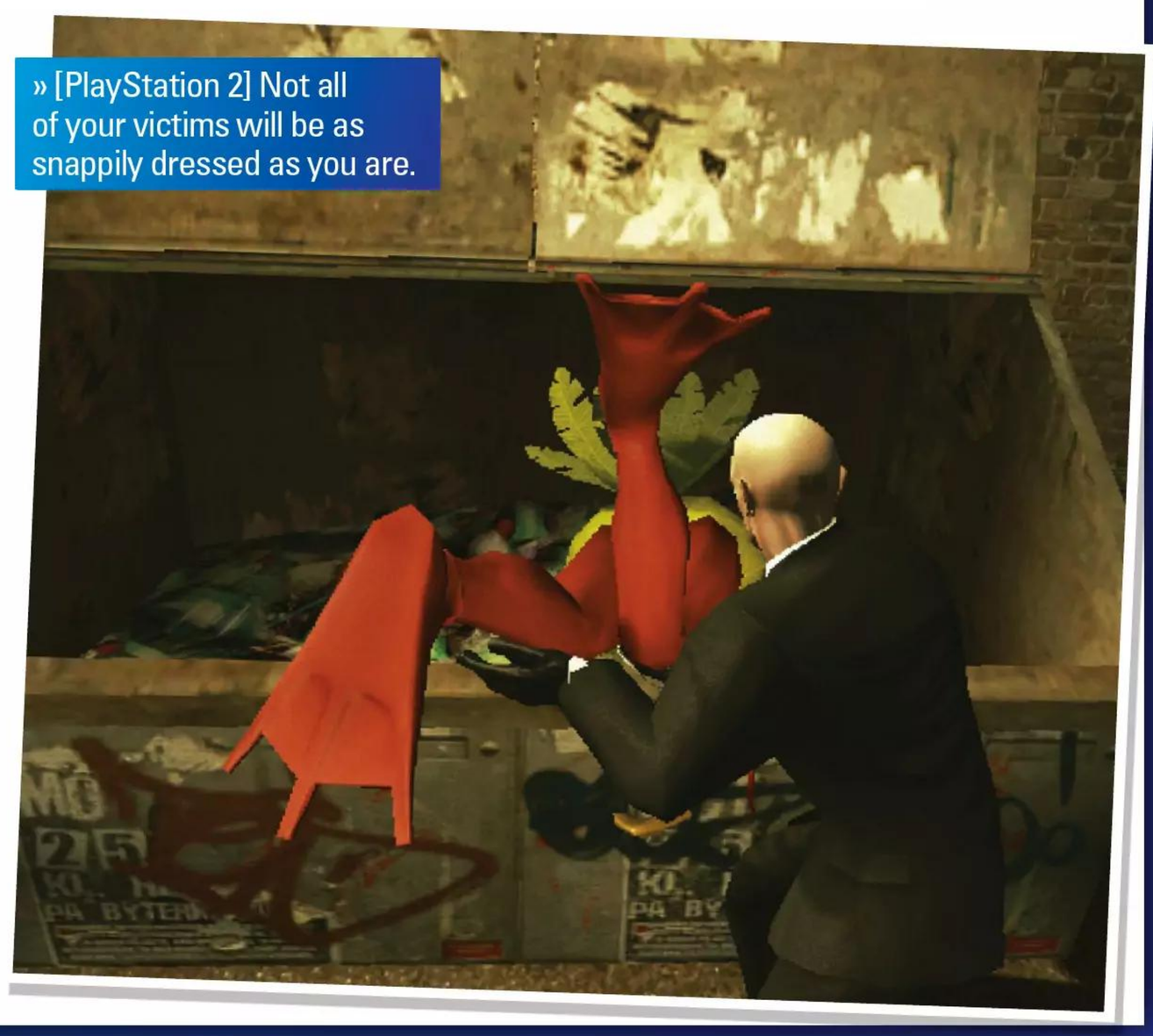
ROGUE WONDER

Jaster Rogue may only be pretending to be the most famous bounty hunter in the galaxy, but he's got the spirit for interplanetary adventure and isn't about to pass it up when he meets a pirate crew. Though *Rogue Galaxy* never achieved the high sales Sony had hoped for, it stands out as an excellent RPG on a system that isn't short of them, thanks to its great cel-shaded graphics and particularly enjoyable combat system.

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY 2006

A KILLER GAME

Agent 47 made a few appearances on the PS2, and his final outing is the best of the bunch. As always, your goal is to dispose of your targets as efficiently as possible, while avoiding drawing any attention. What makes this game so special is the sheer variety of ways in which you can achieve your goal – you'll go back just to see what weapons you can improvise, and what "accidents" you can cause.



» [PlayStation 2] Not all of your victims will be as snappily dressed as you are.

» [PlayStation 2] Nabbing a Power Cell causes Jak and Daxter to show off in numerous, entertaining ways.

JAK AND DAXTER: THE PRECURSOR LEGACY 2001

PLATFORMING PERFECTION FROM NAUGHTY DOG

After proving its platforming credentials on Sony's PlayStation with *Crash Bandicoot*, developer Naughty Dog's PS2 debut proved to be just as ambitious. Notable for its slick platforming and terrific technical prowess (there's no loading to be experienced as you explore the game's giant world) *The Precursor Legacy* is a truly exceptional PS2 platformer.

» [PlayStation 2] *Frontline*'s epic assault on Omaha Beach remains a PS2 highlight.

MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE 2002

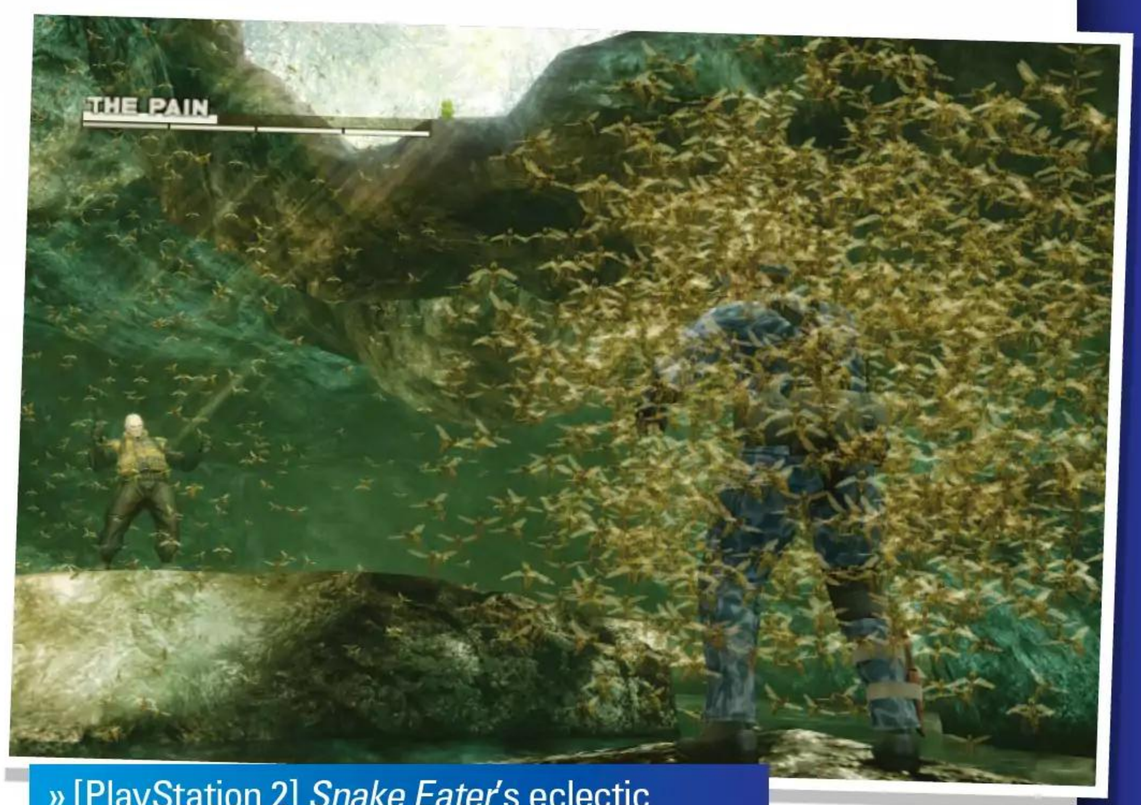
AN ASSAULT ON THE SENSES

Although it didn't feature the involvement of Steven Spielberg, *Frontline* nonetheless managed to offer the same gritty portrayal of war as its PlayStation predecessors. Fuelled by Michael Giacchino's rousing soundtrack, *Frontline* kicks off with the epic assault on Omaha Beach and keeps the action as relentless as its story is gripping. While the original PS2 release remains easily accessible, an HD remaster was released with the PS3 version of *Medal Of Honor* in 2010.

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER 2004

HIDEO KOJIMA GOES JUNGLE

Its new remaster may be around the corner, but there's still plenty of mileage in Naked Snake's jungle adventure. This is perhaps Hideo Kojima at his most wildly ambitious, with a nutty yet compelling story, truly staggering boss encounters and dynamic and nuanced game mechanics, not to mention a belter of an intro. Grab the *Subsistence* version, as it offers the definitive experience. Is this the best *Metal Gear* game? Quite possibly.



» [PlayStation 2] *Snake Eater*'s eclectic bosses remain some of the best in the series.

» [PlayStation 2] Fumito Ueda's minimalist game still has power.

ICO 2001

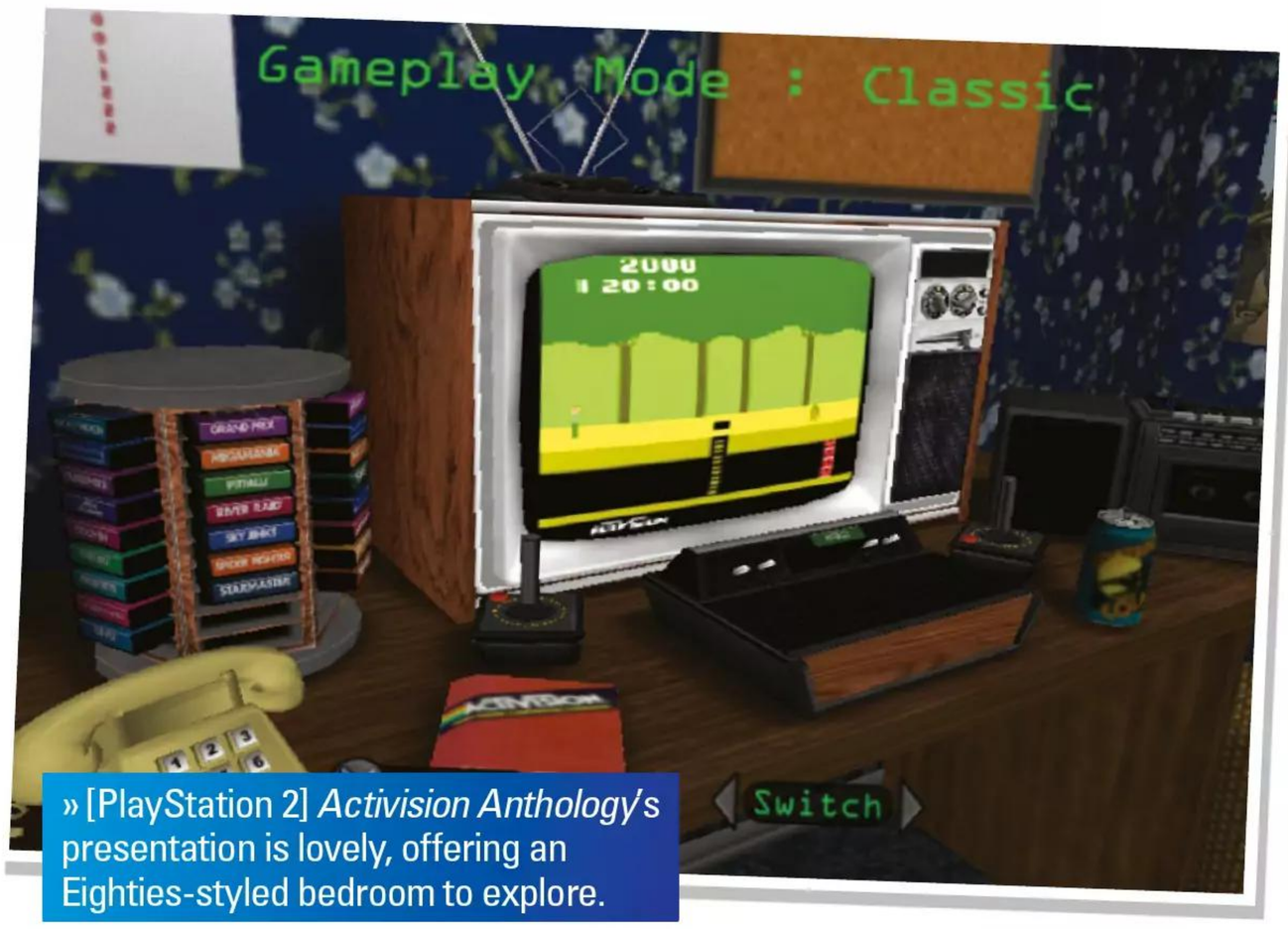
AN ICONIC DEBUT

Originally planned for Sony's PlayStation, *Ico* was eventually launched on the PS2 and became one of its most endearing adventures. While it's rather simple mechanically, it is *Ico*'s rich atmosphere and the enchanting relationship you share with the also-imprisoned Yorda that gives the game its heart, pushing you on as you attempt to flee the castle you've both been trapped in. It's not the longest game, but you'll savour every magnificent minute of it.

ACTIVISION ANTHOLOGY 2002

OLDIES BUT GOODIES

Not only does *Activision Anthology* feature great emulation of nearly 50 classic Atari 2600 games, like the *Pitfall!*s, *River Raid*s and *HERO*, it marries them to a selection of classic Eighties tunes, including *The Safety Dance*, *Take On Me* and *Tainted Love*. It's a glorious love letter to Activision's important and domineering early years and absolutely reeks of Eighties nostalgia.



» [PlayStation 2] *Activision Anthology*'s presentation is lovely, offering an Eighties-styled bedroom to explore.

GRAN TURISMO 4 2004

THE PETROLHEAD'S DREAM FULFILLED

The *Gran Turismo* name has been associated with lofty standards since the very first PlayStation game back in 1997, and the fourth entry in the series lives up to them. You expect to see some of the most realistic graphics that the PlayStation 2 can deliver, and that's what you get. You assume there will be an enormous selection of vehicles, from humble family hatchbacks to awe-inspiring supercars, and sure enough there are over 700 of them in the game.

Gran Turismo 4 shines in comparison to its predecessor thanks to its massively expanded selection of tracks to race on, including real racing circuits such as Suzuka, the Nürburgring and the famous Circuit de la Sarthe at Le Mans. Additionally, the B-Spec mode lets you leave the driving to the CPU so you can enjoy playing crew chief instead.

» [PlayStation 2] As always, replays afford you an opportunity to admire the detailed car models.

» [PlayStation 2] Every good hero needs a flamethrower, right? That's normal, isn't it?

RATCHET & CLANK 2002

BLOW-'EM-UP BLISS

If you've ever thought that what 3D platform games need is a healthy dose of firepower, this gem from Insomniac Games should be right up your street. Ratchet is a mechanic, whose life changes when a little robot crash lands on his home planet and asks him for help in saving planets from being harvested by the evil Chairman Drek.

The platforming in *Ratchet & Clank* is mighty fine, as you'd expect from the developer who created the *Spyro The Dragon* series on the original PlayStation, but the emphasis on weaponry and gadgets really sets it apart from similar games. From the Pyrocitor flamethrower to the Suck Cannon that allows you to use enemies as ammunition, this is a game made by people who really understood the pure joy of blowing things up, and who wanted to give you as many ways as possible to experience that thrill.

» [PlayStation 2] Here's Tom Morello from Rage Against The Machine – he's one of the game's bosses.

GUITAR HERO III: LEGENDS OF ROCK 2007

HEADLINE YOUR HOUSE PARTY

The PlayStation 2 may only have two controller ports, but thanks to a range of peripheral-based party games it's a surprisingly good party machine. While the likes of *Buzz!* and the EyeToy games have their place, it's *Guitar Hero* that takes the headline spot – and specifically, the excellent third entry in the series.

As well as having a Career mode that incorporates a story for the first time in the series, the game boasts an excellent set of songs – you've got Iron Maiden's *The Number Of The Beast*, *Sabotage* by The Beastie Boys, Black Sabbath's *Paranoid* and plenty more from the likes of AFI, Kiss, Muse, Slipknot and ZZ Top. We also can't forget *Through The Fire And Flames* – the DragonForce track that still serves as a mighty challenge for any aspiring plastic guitar perfectionist.

» [PlayStation 2] Get hit enough times and Maximo will run around in his heart-patterned boxers.

MAXIMO 2001

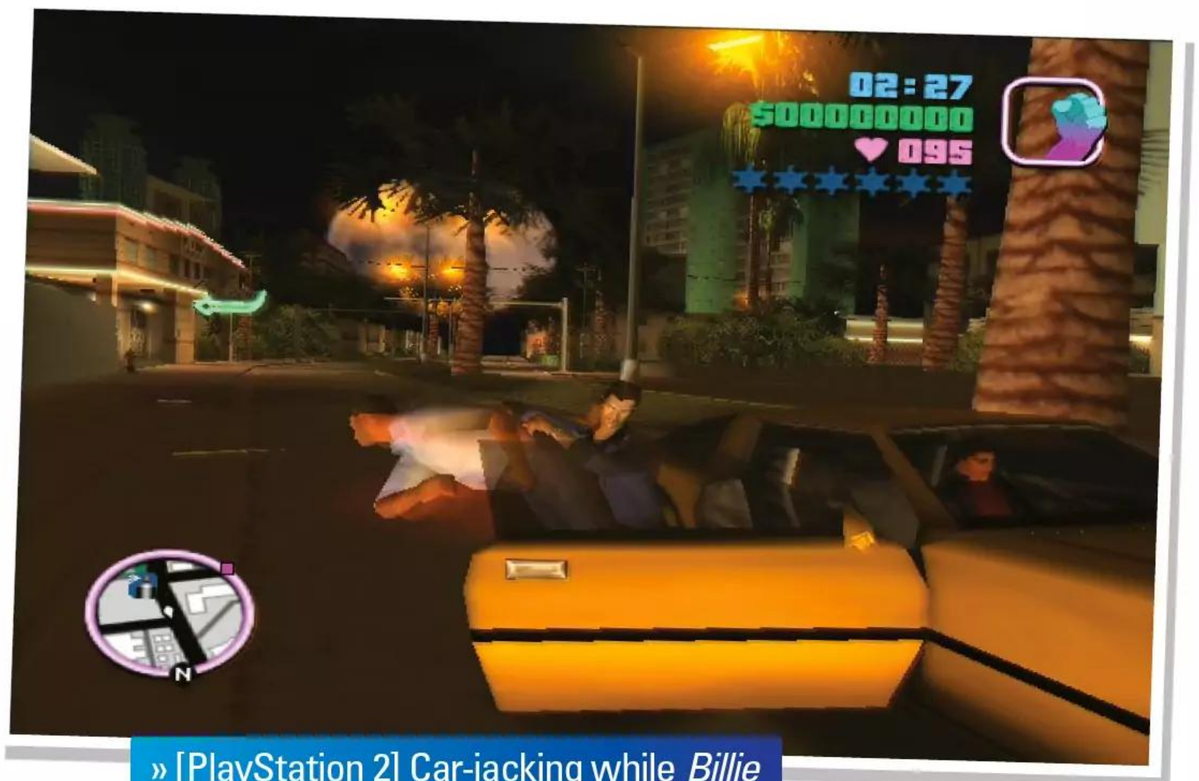
GHOSTS 'N BOXERS

The sequel to this spiritual successor to *Ghosts 'N Goblins* also appears on the PlayStation 2, but we prefer the hub-like world approach that the original game takes. While the story is rather weak, *Maximo*'s clever level design and fantastic boss encounters will keep you playing. Yes, it's tough, but it's never unfair and we love how it encourages you to thoroughly explore each carefully crafted stage.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY 2002

LONG LIVE THE EIGHTIES

Yes. We know. All the *GTA* games are good on PS2, so stop complaining that we've only picked one. We've chosen sunny *Vice City* and the reason is obvious – you can run pedestrians over and pop caps in other gangsters while countless bangers from the Eighties play out over your car's speakers. We generally prefer the story and characters in this one too, even if it doesn't push the series in the way *San Andreas* did.



» [PlayStation 2] Car-jacking while *Billie Jean* blasts out will never get out.

» [PlayStation 2] *Disgaea*'s combat starts off simply, but soon offers layers of deep strategy.

DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS 2003

DEMONICALLY GOOD FUN

The darkness in Nippon Ichi's game can last for hundreds of hours and it's likely you'll never get bored. Not only does *Disgaea* still look gorgeous, thanks to its distinctive pixel art, but it offers bitingly dark humour, entertaining characters and strategically challenging battles. Oh, and the ability to go inside an item (which can have up to 100 levels) to enhance it still floors us.

HALF-LIFE 2001

NO HALF MEASURES HERE

Dreamcast's loss became PS2's gain as Valve's groundbreaking FPS was built from the cancelled remains of Sega's game (which eventually surfaced online). The end result is a fantastic port that features numerous enhancements and still stands as one of the PS2's best story-driven FPS games. Gearbox Software did superb work and even managed to add dynamic lighting and an exclusive (for the time at least) multiplayer mode.

» [PlayStation 2] Gordon Freeman's very bad day continues.

» [PlayStation 2] Is this one of the PlayStation 2's most stylish games? We certainly think so.

ZONE OF THE ENDERS: THE 2ND RUNNER 2003

SHORT BUT STYLISH

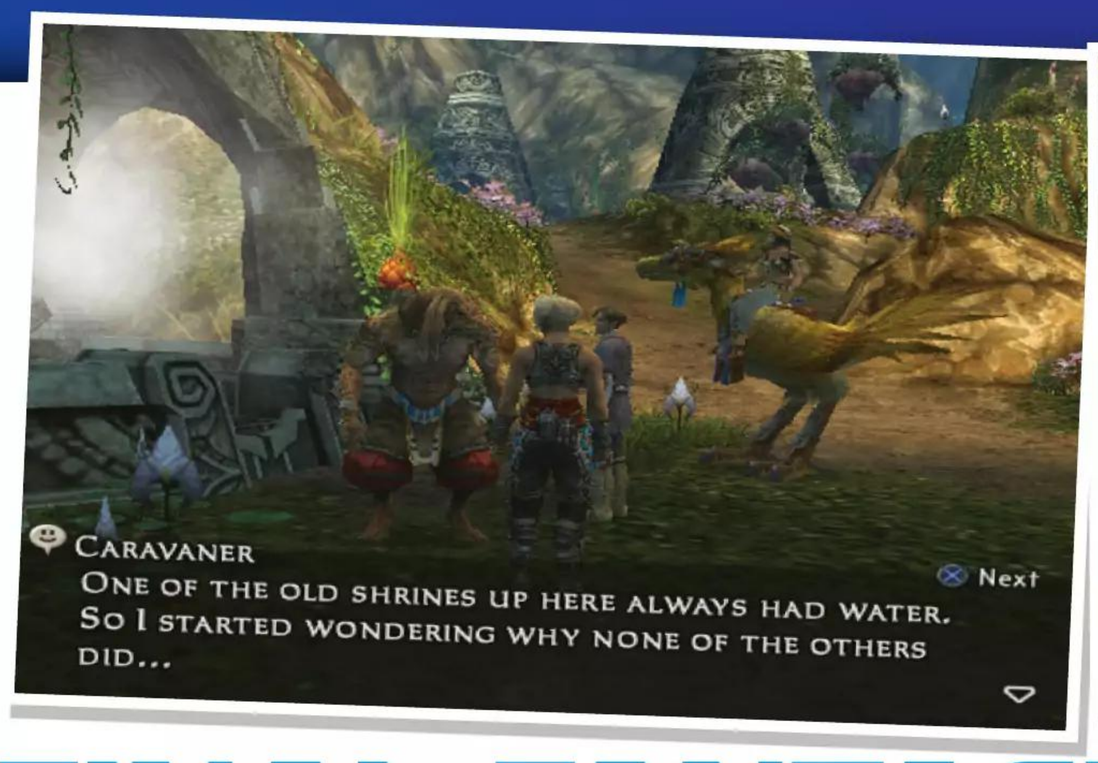
It may be painfully short, but Konami's sequel improves on its predecessor in notable ways. Its action is more frantic and focussed, Jehuty (your Orbital Frame) has greatly upgraded weaponry and it even includes a hidden 3D remake of *Gradius*. There may be very little substance to *The 2nd Runner*, but it's hard to care about that when it manages to be this stylish.

THE WARRIORS 2005

COMING OUT TO PLAY?

We're not sure if it was genius or idiocy that fuelled Rockstar's adaptation of Walter Hill's 1979 cult movie, but the results speak for themselves. *The Warriors* is not only an ambitious 3D scrolling fighter, but treats its source material with real respect. Even if you've never watched the 1979 movie you're still in for a hell of a lot of fun.

» [PlayStation 2] Rockstar's game captures all the brutality of Walter Hill's cult film.



» [PlayStation 2] There are no loading screens or even pauses – you're permanently ready to fight.

FINAL FANTASY XII 2006

FINALLY FIXING THE FORMULA

Though *Final Fantasy X* was certainly a highlight of the PlayStation 2's early days, we prefer this RPG from the console's later life. The game follows the aspiring sky pirate Vaan and the exiled princess Ashe, as they resist a mighty imperial force that is gearing up for war in the land of Ivalice.

The excellent story and high-quality graphics are par for the course for *Final Fantasy*, but the gameplay changes set it apart from prior entries in the series. Monsters are visible on the map, exploration and combat are no longer divided, and you can use the new Gambit function to determine how your party members will react to certain situations in advance. It's not the friendliest system for RPG newcomers, but seasoned fans will appreciate the flexibility it offers.

KATAMARI DAMACY 2004

KEEP ROLLIN', ROLLIN', ROLLIN'

We're not entirely sure how it's possible to break the entire night sky, but the King Of All Cosmos got drunk and managed to do just that – and now it's his diminutive son's problem, and therefore your problem. To fix things, you have to go to Earth and roll objects into giant balls, before sending them into the night sky to become new stars.

The unique roll-'em-up gameplay isn't just a neat concept, but one that works extremely well thanks to the excellent dual analogue control system, and on top of that the game boasts some hilarious writing and wonderful stylised graphics. Criminally, *Katamari Damacy* never saw a PAL PlayStation 2 release, so if you're not able to play import games on your console you might want to check out the PS4 remaster *Katamari Damacy Reroll*.

» [PlayStation 2] Roll up enough building blocks and soon, you'll be able to roll up people.

» [PlayStation 2] Uh-oh, looks like Sly's about to have a bad time with a guard.

SLY 2: BAND OF THIEVES 2004

THIS RACCOON WILL STEAL YOUR HEART

The *Sly Cooper* series is a trilogy of all-ages stealth games with cel-shaded visuals and a cast of cartoon critters, and it's one of the most recognisable series to get its start on the PlayStation 2.

You play as Sly, a raccoon and a master thief, as well as his partners in crime Bentley (a turtle) and Murray (a hippo), and pull off heists around the globe with the noble goal of stopping the nefarious Klaww Gang.

This middle entry in the trilogy best nails the formula. It's more forgiving than the original, which is good for younger players, and the addition of Sly's allies allows for a greater depth of strategy as you utilise each character's skills to make progress toward a larger goal.

» [PlayStation 2] Time slows down, *Matrix*-style, as Lara leaps from a baddie's shoulders.

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND 2006

A LEGENDARY FRESH START

There's no escaping the fact that Lara Croft didn't make the best first impression on the PlayStation 2, but fans soon forgot *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness* thanks to this strong reboot by Crystal Dynamics. Lara's adventures take her from Bolivian ruins to yakuza offices in Tokyo and even the distant land of Cornwall, as she investigates artefacts that she believes are connected to her mother's disappearance.

Thanks to the game's modernised control system, it's much easier to make Lara move with the grace and athleticism that her character has always been associated with, leaving you to concentrate on the platforming challenges and puzzles. She's also fearsome when the guns are drawn, able to vault over the heads of enemies and unload clips into them in a beautiful bullet ballet.

» [PlayStation 2] Grab a hotel sign and smash it over some gangster's head, it's all fine here.

YAKUZA 2005

SO GOOD, IT'S CRIMINAL

In some ways, it's weird to look back at the beginning of the *Like A Dragon* series. The celebrity voice actors and profanity-laden English dub feel weirdly out of place, and it doesn't embrace ridiculousness nearly as readily. However, the foundations of the series shine through – there's a compelling crime story to enjoy, punctuated by bouts of satisfyingly brutal brawling and minigames that give you a little taste of Tokyo.

» [PlayStation 2] You'll need to avoid civilian traffic as you evade law enforcement.

NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED 2005

DANGEROUS DRIVING

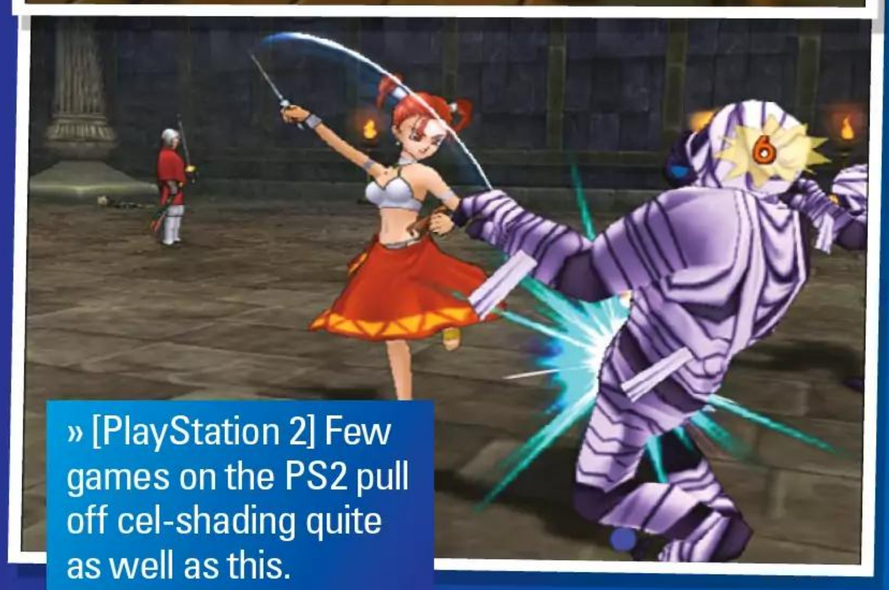
EA's street racing series thrived on Sony's console, and this effort narrowly gets the nod over earlier PS2 release *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2*. You get an open map to explore, as you endeavour to outrun the cops and become the street racer they can only dream of catching. If you can, pick up the *Black Edition* – it features extra cars and races over the original release.

SOULCALIBUR III 2005

CUTTING-EDGE FIGHTING

The PlayStation 2 got this entry in the renowned 3D fighting series all to itself, and it's a cracker. Tira, Zasalamel and Setsuka all join the cast of characters, but if they're not to your liking it's possible to make your own from scratch. There's a unique challenge for solo players to tackle in Chronicles Of The Sword mode, which blends strategy and fighting gameplay.

» [PlayStation 2] Tira's giant ring blade makes her stand out among the game's new fighters.



» [PlayStation 2] Few games on the PS2 pull off cel-shading quite as well as this.

DRAGON QUEST: THE JOURNEY OF THE CURSED KING 2004

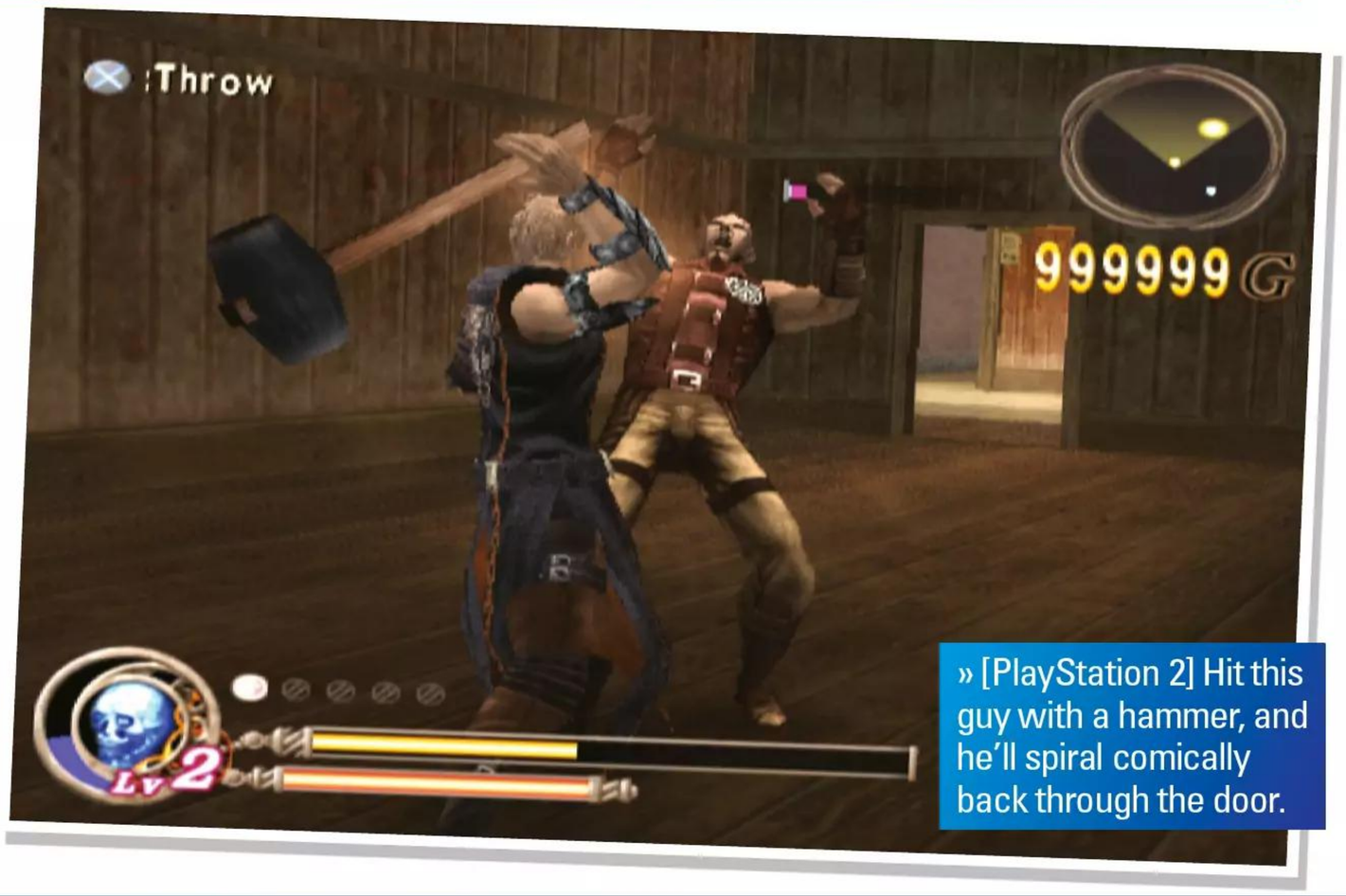
ROLE-PLAYING GREATNESS

When you want a nice, cosy Japanese RPG to sit down with, the only major PlayStation 2 instalment in this classic series – and the first to ever make it to Europe – is just the ticket. The story and gameplay aren't groundbreaking but they are expertly delivered, and the colourful cel-shaded graphics are the perfect approach for the first 3D *Dragon Quest*, bringing the late Akira Toriyama's character designs to life beautifully.

GOD HAND 2006

A KILLER GAME

Clover Studio's final production is a cult classic that updates the beat-'em-up for the 3D era, in the most delightfully over-the-top manner possible. You can knee massive blokes in the face repeatedly before hitting them with wrestling moves, or just kick them in the nuts. It's silly and it's certainly not for everyone, but it's a riot if you're attuned to its offbeat humour.



» [PlayStation 2] Hit this guy with a hammer, and he'll spiral comically back through the door.

» [PlayStation 2] *Gradius V* is filled with neat little nods to previous games in the series.

GRADIUS V 2004

A SHMUP TO TREASURE

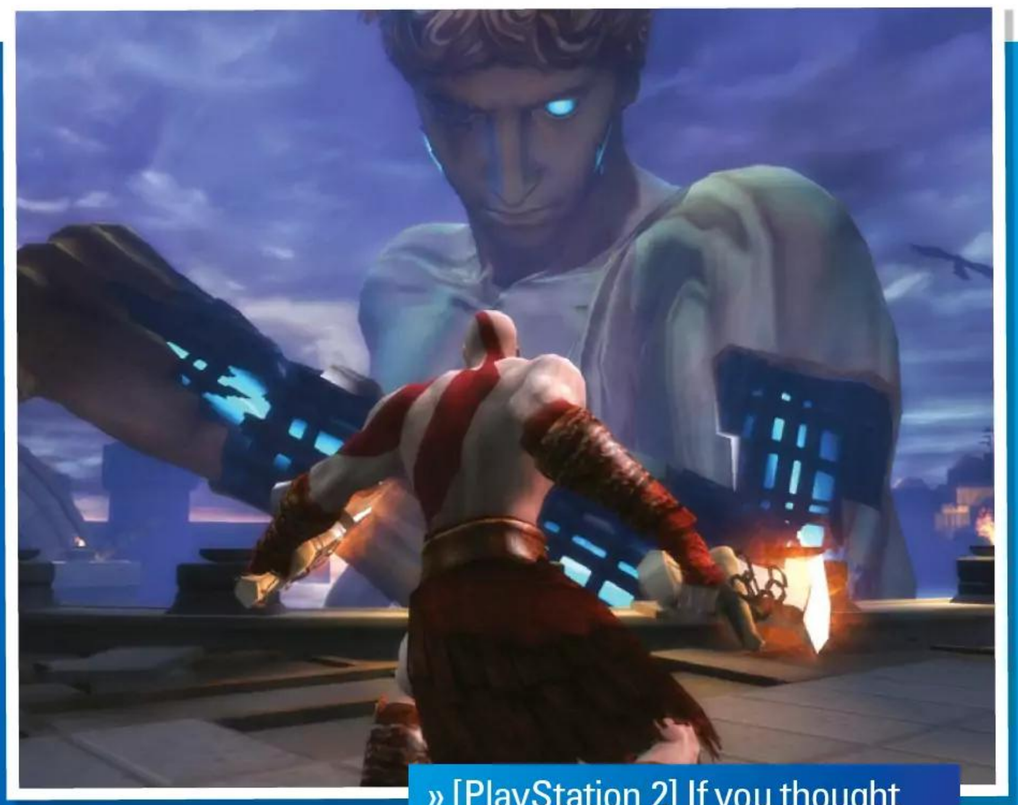
While Konami has never given an official reason for why there's never been a home-console sequel to *Gradius V* (*Rebirth* is a remake so doesn't count) we'd like to think it's because it knows it could never top Treasure's masterpiece. Rightly considered one of the greatest side-scrolling shmups of all time, Treasure's sequel reinvigorated the then-dormant series and remains a PS2 exclusive. Aside from being able to manipulate Options, it does little to push the series mechanically, but it still ranks alongside *doDonPachi DaiOuJou* as one of the PS2's finest shmups.

» [PlayStation 2] *Coast 2 Coast*'s drifting is exceptionally satisfying and incredibly stylish to boot.

OUTRUN 2006: COAST 2 COAST 2006

DRIVING WITH STYLE

When you realise Sega's arcade racer was built on souped-up Xbox hardware, Sumo's PS2 and PSP ports become even more impressive. Sumo's racer is not only an accurate port of the arcade classic and its *Special Tours* upgrade, but also includes the titular Coast 2 Coast mode that greatly improves the game's longevity – after all, you can hurtle through five gorgeous-looking courses in around the same number of minutes. That longevity is further extended by the inclusion of OutRun Miles, which allow you to buy numerous cars, tracks and music, meaning you'll have plenty of reasons to continue playing.



» [PlayStation 2] If you thought *God Of War*'s Hydra boss was impressive, wait until you face off against the sequel's Colossus.

GOD OF WAR II 2007

A CHAOTICALLY GOOD SEQUEL

Santa Monica Studio's *God Of War II* is a riotously epic follow-up that turns everything up to 11 with spectacular setpieces that are as over the top as its angry protagonist. Kratos' second adventure may not be a significant mechanical evolution from his first, but its scope, scale and outrageously dramatic boss fights are on another level. While Santa Monica Studio certainly invests in the sheer amount of carnage Kratos can cause, the God Of War himself is just as well-crafted as the combat, making him feel more layered than he did in the PS2 original. Remasters for the PS3 and PS Vita exist, but the original is still worth revisiting.

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS 2005

BIG, BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL

There are far better ways to play Team Ico's game today, but that doesn't mean you should ignore where its journey started. Wildly ambitious on release, Fumito Ueda's vision pushed Sony's console to its breaking point, but those lofty ambitions mean it remains an astonishing-looking game today. As much a puzzle game as an adventure – working out how to find a Colossus can be just as tricky as defeating it – it's a surprisingly poignant game that dovetails cleverly with Team Ico's earlier release, *Ico*.

» [PlayStation 2] You can't hear it here, but the score that accompanies this terrifying encounter is masterful.

» [PlayStation 2] Everything zooms in when Joe uses his VFX Power, and it looks great.

VIEWTIFUL JOE 2004

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STYLE

Hideki Kamiya's vibrant take on the side-scrolling fighter remains one of the most energetic and flamboyant games to be found on Sony's console. Its cel-shaded look simply hasn't aged, its bosses are as entertaining as they are hard to defeat and it's all finished off with a tremendously enjoyable soundtrack. Oh, and *Devil May Cry*'s Dante is included as an unlockable protagonist.

SPIDER-MAN 2 2004

SWING WHEN YOU'RE WINNING

While Spidey's PS1 games were far from slouches, the power of the PS2 really unshackled the true capabilities of everyone's favourite web-swinger. Cockily narrated by Bruce Campbell, Treyarch's game offers an enjoyable storyline, greatly refined web-swinging and some solid combat mechanics. It remains the best movie licence on the console and is easily the system's best open-world game experience outside of the *GTA* games in terms of the breadth of choice and opportunities that it offers the player.

» [PlayStation 2] Treyarch nailed the swinging, meaning moving around New York is satisfyingly easy.

» [PlayStation 2] *Project Zero*'s supernaturally fast ghosts offer plenty of challenge to capture.

PROJECT ZERO 2001

LIGHTS, CAMERA, TERROR!

All three PS2 *Project Zero* games are worthy of your attention, but we feel that the original is the best balanced. There's a macabre story at its beating heart, it remains graphically impressive with plenty of bleak-looking locations to explore and is exceptionally atmospheric. It's the addition of the Camera Obscura that really sells Tecmo's game though, with the fast-paced ghost capturing juxtaposing neatly with the game's more traditional survival horror exploration.

R-TYPE FINAL 2003

BRING ME EVERYTHING!

» [PlayStation 2] *R-Type Final* features a large number of Forces that greatly shake up its gameplay.

As this was planned to be the last *R-Type* game, developer Irem went all out to ensure its former flagship series left a lasting impression. It achieved this by offering alternate routes through stages, over 50 Force upgrades and a staggering 101 ships to choose from. It's not the prettiest shooter, but *R-Type Final*'s challenging gameplay and numerous customisable options means that any reservations about how it looks dissipate on seeing the complexity and longevity it offers next to similar PS2 shmups.

» [PlayStation2] The presentation throughout *Capcom Classics* is excellent.

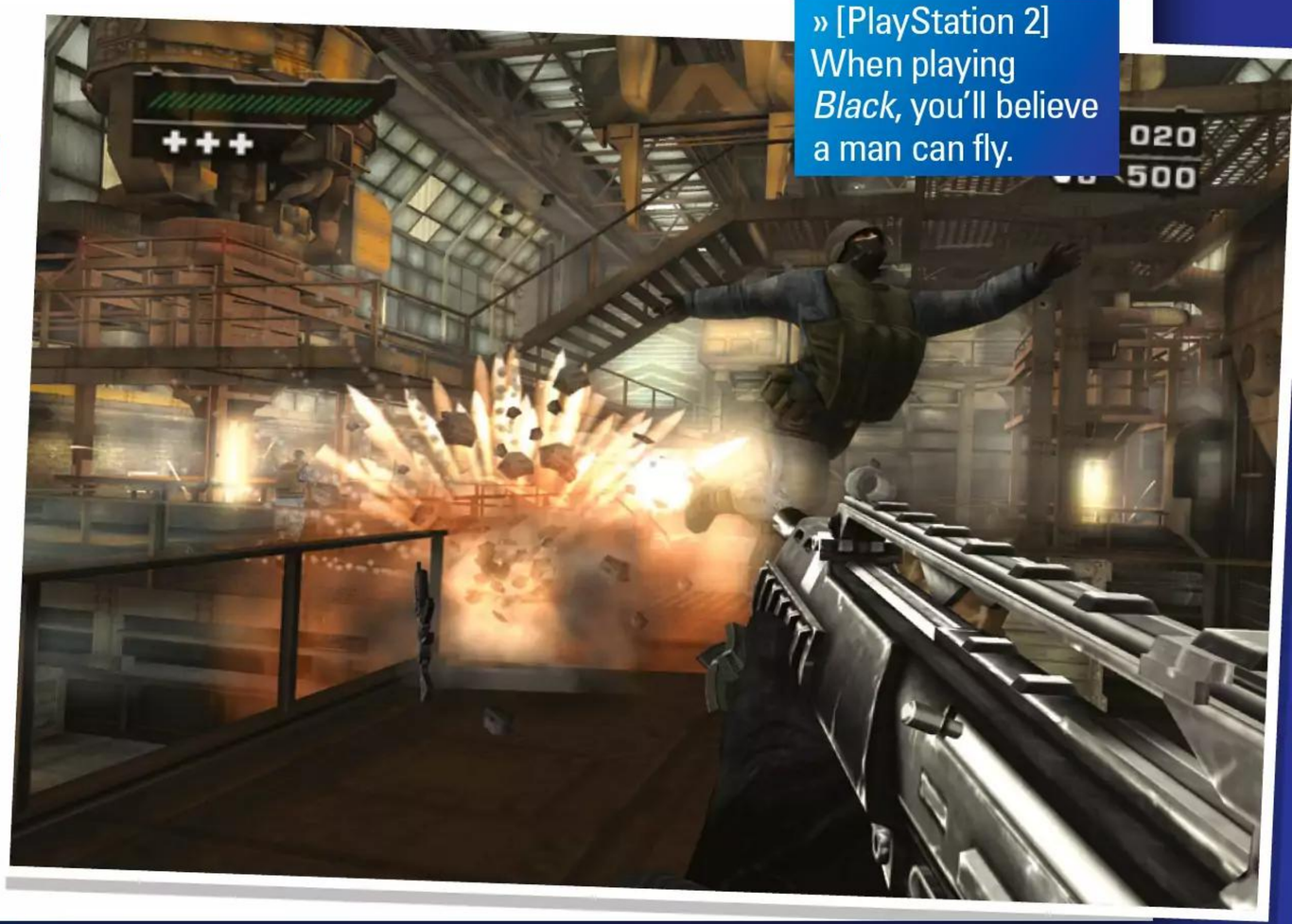
CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION 1&2 2005-6

ENDLESS HOURS OF FUN

Yes we're cheating here by including two games, but it's our list, so there. Retro compilations really came into their own during the PS2's lifetime and Capcom delivered two fantastic offerings. Over 40 games are spread across the two releases, including *Final Fight*, *Strider*, *1942* and *Eco Fighters*. With great emulation and gorgeous presentation they not only offer fantastic value for money, but make you realise just how dominant an arcade presence Capcom once had.

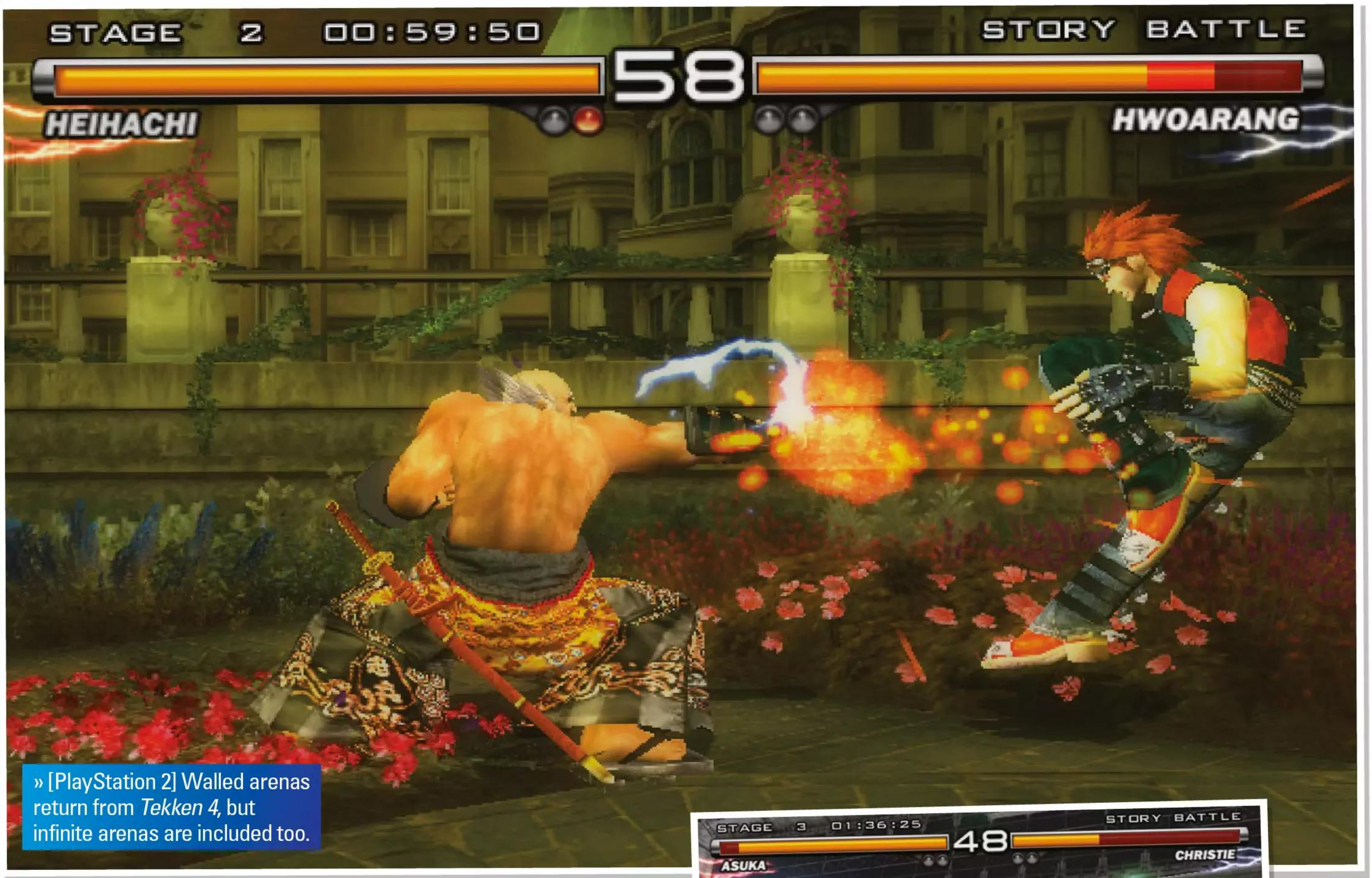
BLACK 2006

APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION



» [PlayStation 2] When playing *Black*, you'll believe a man can fly.

It remains a shocking injustice that *Black* never received a sequel because it's arguably one of the best first-person shooters on Sony's console. While *Black*'s story isn't the best, it excels in brilliantly designed levels, satisfying gunplay and some truly sensational setpieces. It may be short and lack any sort of multiplayer, but the exceptional level design, additional objectives on higher difficulty levels and outrageous destruction you can cause on each stage ensures that Criterion's game is one you'll always want to return to.



» [PlayStation 2] Walled arenas return from *Tekken 4*, but infinite arenas are included too.

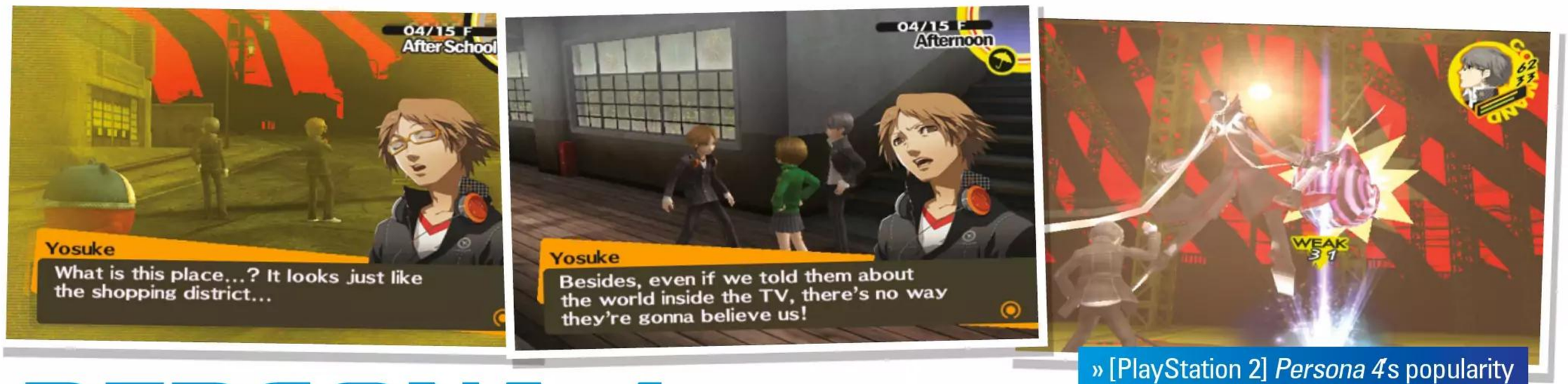
TEKKEN 5 2005

FISTS AND FACES COLLIDE

***Tekken 5* is frequently mentioned when you ask *Tekken* fans about the high points of the series, and for good reason.** Compared to *Tekken 4*, a game which received a mixed response, the fifth game has a reduced emphasis on environmental hazards and plays a bit faster. It also has many more characters, including debuting fighters such as Asuka and Raven.

Though the game later came to PSP with additional characters, the PlayStation 2 version of *Tekken 5* stands out for being far richer in extras. The console-exclusive Devil Within beat-'em-up mode takes on the Tekken Force formula from past games and allows you to dig into Jin Kazama's story, and the full arcade versions of the first three *Tekken* games are included on the disc for you to play too. If all that's not enough, the arcade rail shooter *Starblade* is also included in full.

» [PlayStation 2] New fighter Asuka prepares to snap Christie's arm like a twig.


04/15 F
After School
Yosuke
What is this place...? It looks just like the shopping district...
04/15 F
Afternoon
Yosuke
Besides, even if we told them about the world inside the TV, there's no way they're gonna believe us!
WEAK
3 1

» [PlayStation 2] *Persona 4*'s popularity led to an anime adaptation, as well as fighting and music spin-off games.

PERSONA 4 2008

HIGH SCHOOL AND HOMICIDES

Your parents are spending a year working abroad, but you're not joining them. No, you're going to live with relatives in a sleepy rural town. That's the situation that *Persona 4* puts you in, but country life is far from dull as a series of murders in the town keeps police busy – including your uncle. Meanwhile, you and your classmates soon discover a bizarre world that exists inside TV sets, in which your heroes must fend off shadow creatures with manifestations of their psyches called Personas. Are the two worlds linked – and if so, how? Only you can find out.

Though this RPG arrived late in the PlayStation 2's life, it turned heads thanks to its stylish presentation and a memorable cast of characters that you can get to know better via the Social Link system. It's well worth doing, as this improves your Personas and grants extra abilities in battle.

» [PlayStation 2] Tokyo Megaplex is an incredible course filled with pinball-style hazards and mid-air grind rails.

SSX TRICKY 2001

SNOW COMPETITION

The original *SSX* was a highlight of PlayStation 2's launch, but one year later the superb snowboarding game returned with this huge update. As well as including two new tracks, *SSX Tricky* developer EA Canada heavily revamped the original game's tracks with extra features and routes. Every competitor gains the ability to perform outlandish, physics-defying Uber Tricks for huge scores, and your rivals remember if you attack them and respond in kind. People have argued over whether *SSX Tricky* is a proper sequel, but it doesn't matter – it's a fine game regardless.

» [PlayStation 2] *Amplitude*'s excellent multiplayer mode requires some flexible digit manipulation.

AMPLITUDE 2003

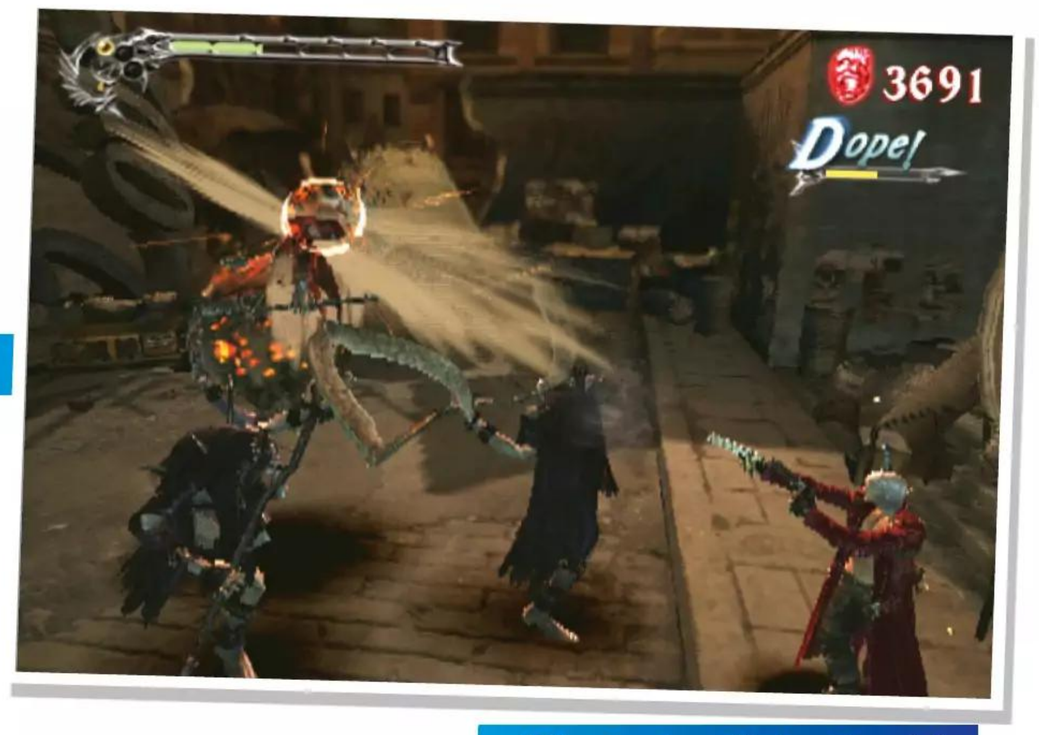
YOUR DIGITS WILL HATE YOU

Harmonix's *FreQuency* sequel is a superb update that keeps the core ideas of the original but expands them in interesting ways. *FreQuency*'s claustrophobic tunnels have been replaced with open playing areas, new modes spice up the gameplay, while Freqs are now fully customisable. It's all topped off by another energetic, eclectic soundtrack that features everything from Garbage's *Cherry Lips* to Freezepop's *Supersprode*.

DEVIL MAY CRY 3: DANTE'S AWAKENING 2005

DANTE RIDES AGAIN

After the misfire that was *Devil May Cry 2*, Capcom's third game is a terrific return to form, ramping up the frenetic action of its predecessors to ridiculous levels. The biggest difference is a greatly overhauled combat engine, with Dante now having access to six distinct fighting styles: Swordmaster, Royal Guard, Trickster, Gunslinger, Quicksilver and Doppelganger. If you can, grab the upgraded *Special Edition*, which is stuffed with great extras.



» [PlayStation 2] The *Special Edition* of *DMC3* introduces Virgil as a playable character.

» [PlayStation 2] This bullet hell will make you swear – and you'll come straight back for more.

DODONPACHI DAIOUJOU 2003

BULLET HELL OR BULLET BLISS?

The best shmup on PS2 is widely considered to be one of the genre's best. It remains an excellent port of Cave's monstrous arcade hit and it's packed with extras, including a detailed Training mode, the Death Label Arcade mode and a merciless difficulty level. You may never see its famed second loop but you'll certainly have fun trying to reach it. Just keep in mind that you'll need to import it.

RED FACTION 2001

MARS ATTACKS

» [PlayStation 2] The carnage you can create in *Red Faction* is really quite something.

Volition's *Red Faction* still holds up as one of the PlayStation 2's slickest FPSes. There's a gripping story at its core, the available weapons are nice and varied and the Geo Mod technology that fuels the game lets you rip apart the environment in wonderfully destructive ways. An enhanced digital version exists with Trophy Support and high-res visuals, if you're too lazy to turn your PS2 on.

» [PlayStation 2] *Odin Sphere*'s mayors are outlandish-looking creations that pack quite the wallop.

ODIN SPHERE 2007

PERFECT PIXEL ART

While Vanillaware's game is available on modern systems, the PS2 original remains a striking addition to your library. Part RPG, part scrolling fighter, this spiritual successor to the Saturn's *Princess Crown* is an action RPG with mesmerising pixel art, some truly gargantuan bosses and a gorgeous score. The five available characters all play differently to each other, while the game's unique Psypher system helps it stand out from other experience-focussed RPGs.

» [PlayStation 2] *Future Perfect* is a great ending to the trilogy. What a shame we didn't get any more.

TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT 2005

A TIME TO KILL, AND THRILL

All the *TimeSplitters* games are good value on Sony's console, but this entry clinches the lead thanks to an entertaining time-travel story, its great range of weapons and some blindingly good multiplayer maps. Arcade and Challenge mode offer plenty of longevity once you've burned through the main story, while Mapmaker allows you to craft your own levels if you ever get bored with multiplayer.

» [PlayStation 2] North East London (not Spurs) put one past East London (definitely not West Ham). Nice.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5 2005

STILL THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

During the PlayStation 2 era, two great rivals clashed for the affections of football-loving gamers. The *FIFA* series had the licensed teams and slick presentation, and made great strides over the years. However, when it came to the action on the pitch, EA could never quite best Konami's *Pro Evolution Soccer* series (known as *Winning Eleven* internationally).

As the last entry to arrive before Konami had to consider a new generation of hardware, Pro *Evolution Soccer 5* represents the peak of the series on PS2, and it's still worth going back to. It may not be the most up to date game, but it's rather nice to settle into a Master League session without having to worry about the financial pressures and grinding that characterise today's live-service football games.

BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN 2004

SUPER, SMASHING, GREAT

You can't really go wrong with any of the *Burnout* games on the PS2, but the third time really is the charm when it comes to this arcade racing series. The first two games depict spectacular crashes, but ideally you don't want to see those because they mean you've messed up. *Burnout 3: Takedown* encourages you to cause crashes by ramming your rivals into walls, nudging them into oncoming traffic and generally being hostile.

The game's cars and excellently designed tracks are graphically detailed but it maintains smooth 60fps performance, which we're thankful for because with aggressive adversaries constantly on your tail, you really need every split second of reaction time. There's also a great licensed soundtrack to drive to, taking in names such as Franz Ferdinand, Jimmy Eat World, My Chemical Romance and Rise Against.

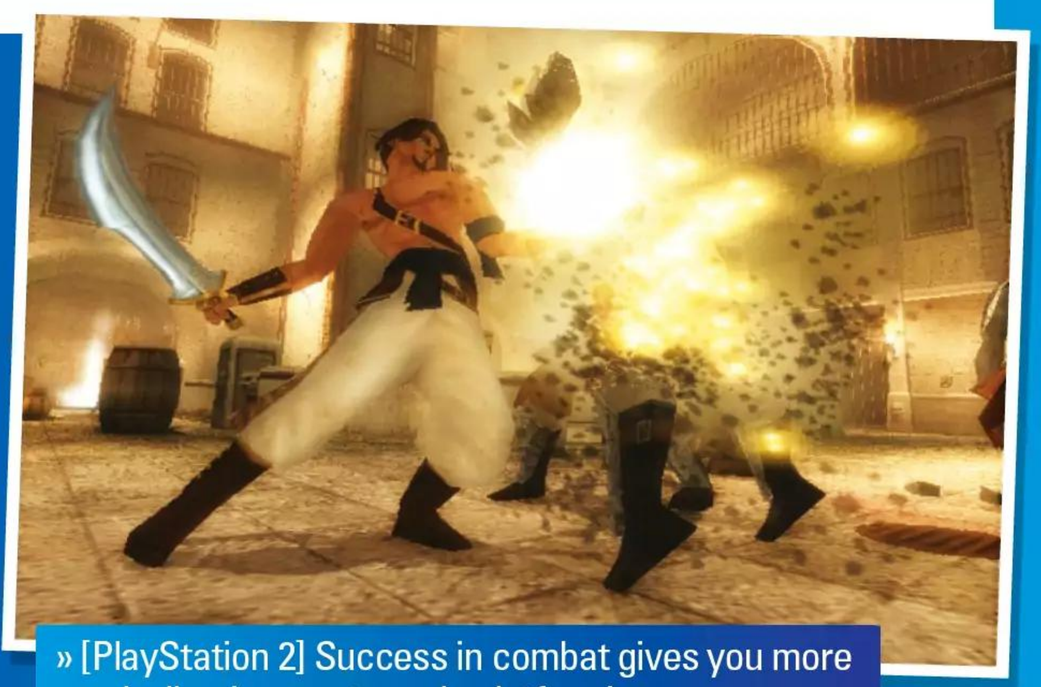
» [PlayStation 2] Road Rage events task you with taking down multiple opponents within a time limit.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME 2003

MAKE TIME FOR THIS

After being tricked into releasing the titular sands by the evil vizier, the Prince has to put things right in this action adventure. Fortunately, those sands allow him to rewind time to avoid fatal errors while navigating the expertly designed platforming sections, which are a joy to tackle thanks to impressively smooth controls. Later on, the Prince can freeze time to give himself a combat advantage.

Though Ubisoft Montreal wasn't the first developer to attempt to adapt *Prince Of Persia* for 3D environments, it set the template for every game that followed with this classic adventure, including two PlayStation 2 sequels. While *Warrior Within* and *The Two Thrones* aren't quite as memorable, they're certainly worth having as well if you find the *Prince Of Persia Trilogy* box set.



» [PlayStation 2] Success in combat gives you more sand, allowing you to undo platforming errors.

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2003

YOU WON'T BE BOARD

Annual sequels might be crowd-pleasers, but they can also burn audiences out, and *Tony Hawk's Underground* shows that Neversoft recognised this problem in advance. With the core skateboarding mechanics well established over the first four games in the series, this game features plenty of major structural changes that distinguish it from its predecessors.

Instead of simply presenting you with a timer and a list of goals as the earlier games did, *Tony Hawk's Underground* contextualises the action with a narrative. You can freely explore the larger levels, even hopping off your board if you choose, in order to talk to people and find new tasks. The game also arrests the trend of escalating difficulty seen in the prior instalments by adding adjustable difficulty levels.

» [PlayStation 2] This looks like a picture taken seconds before a disastrous face plant.

» [PlayStation 2] Each player gets a different viewpoint – sometimes you can even see your partner.

TIME CRISIS II 2001

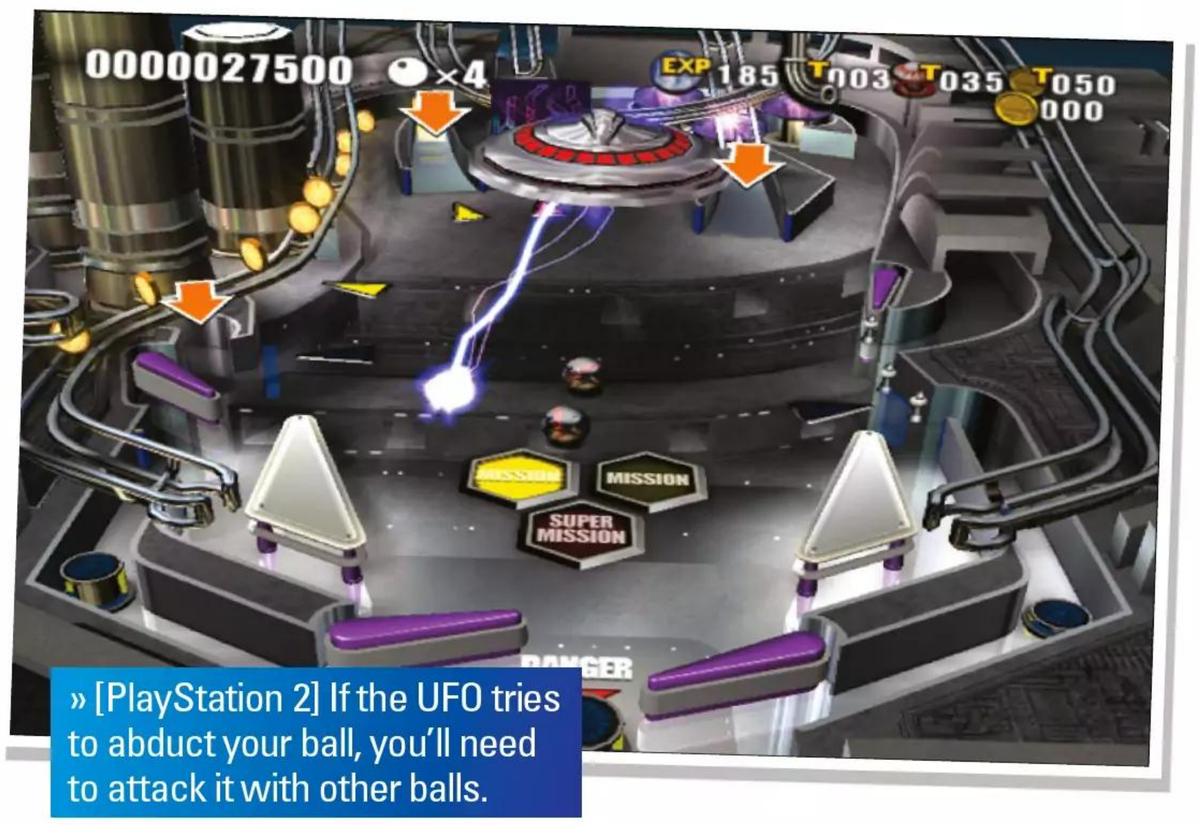
A CRISIS SHARED

The sequel to *Time Crisis* ups the ante with more exciting boss battles and co-op play, but this isn't a perfect conversion of the arcade lightgun classic – it's actually better, thanks to a graphical overhaul and extra minigames like Quick & Crash. The G-Con 2 gun is nice and accurate, and if you can manage to put together the rare iLink setup you can even play the two-player mode without resorting to split-screen options.

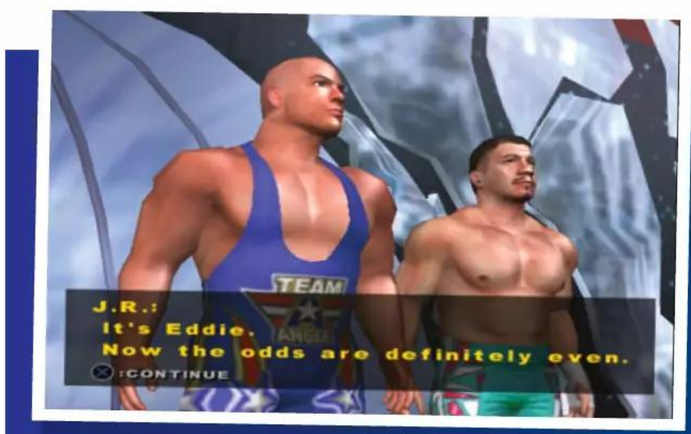
FLIPNIC 2003

PINBALL WITHOUT THE TABLE

This cult favourite pinball game was designed and produced by *FantaVision* and *Ape Escape* designer Katsuyuki Kanetaka, and it inherits their quirky nature. Rather than trying to simulate realistic tables, *Flipnic* presents impossible layouts with multiple sub-areas and plenty of minigames to activate. It's a hard game to predict – one minute you're under attack from flying saucers, the next you'll smash through a waterfall to reveal a pinball platform game.



» [PlayStation 2] If the UFO tries to abduct your ball, you'll need to attack it with other balls.



» [PlayStation 2] It's breaking down in the Elimination Chamber, as Booker T tries to finish Rob Van Dam.

WWE SMACKDOWN!: HERE COMES THE PAIN 2003

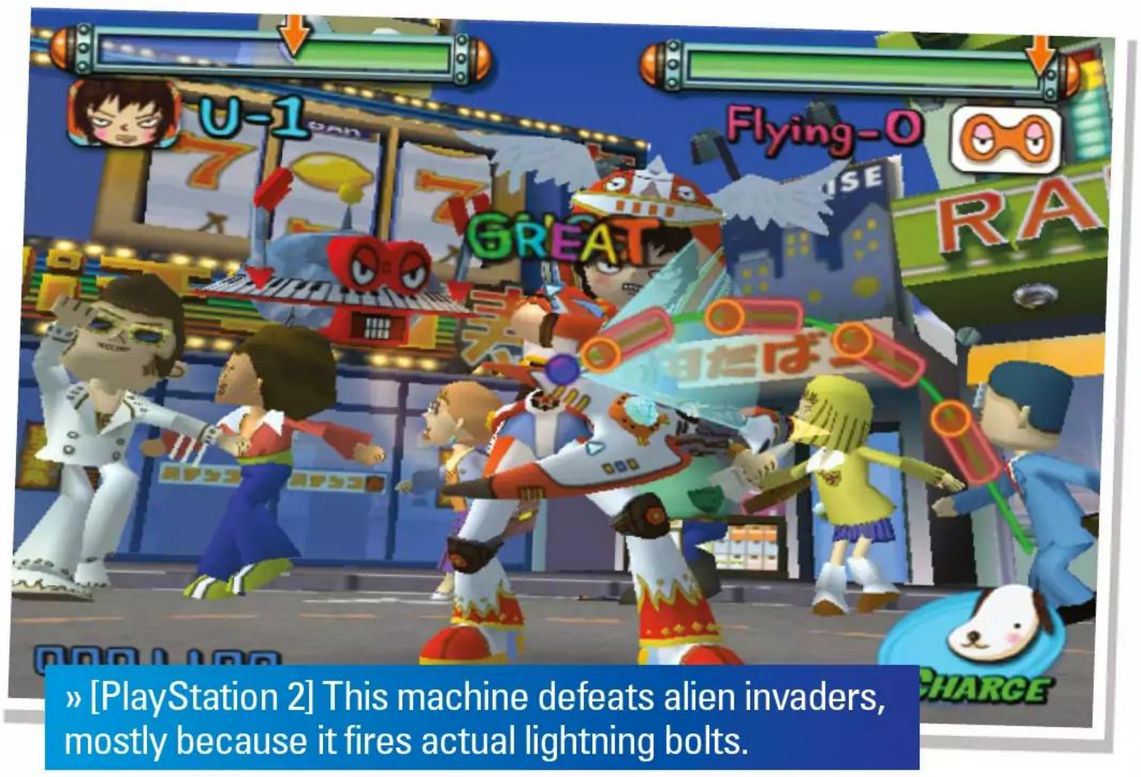
A REAL ROCKET BUSTER

Even if you're not a wrestling fan, *WWE* games entertain because of the wacky situations that the beefy brawlers end up in. This classic includes over a dozen match types, from table and ladder matches to the videogame debut of the Elimination Chamber, and you'll get to experience them all in a great career mode. Better yet, the roster takes in stars like Steve Austin and The Rock, John Cena and Batista, and even Roddy Piper and the Iron Sheik.

GITAROO MAN 2001

SHRED YOUR TROUBLES AWAY

This cult favourite rhythm game follows U-1, a kid who happens to be rather down on his luck until his dog grants him the ability to become the heroic Gitaroo Man, with the goal of saving Planet Gitaroo from the Gravillian Empire's invasion. The story and soundtrack are enjoyable, and while they're equally good in the later PSP version, it's easier to control on the PS2 as the gameplay relies heavily on the analogue stick.

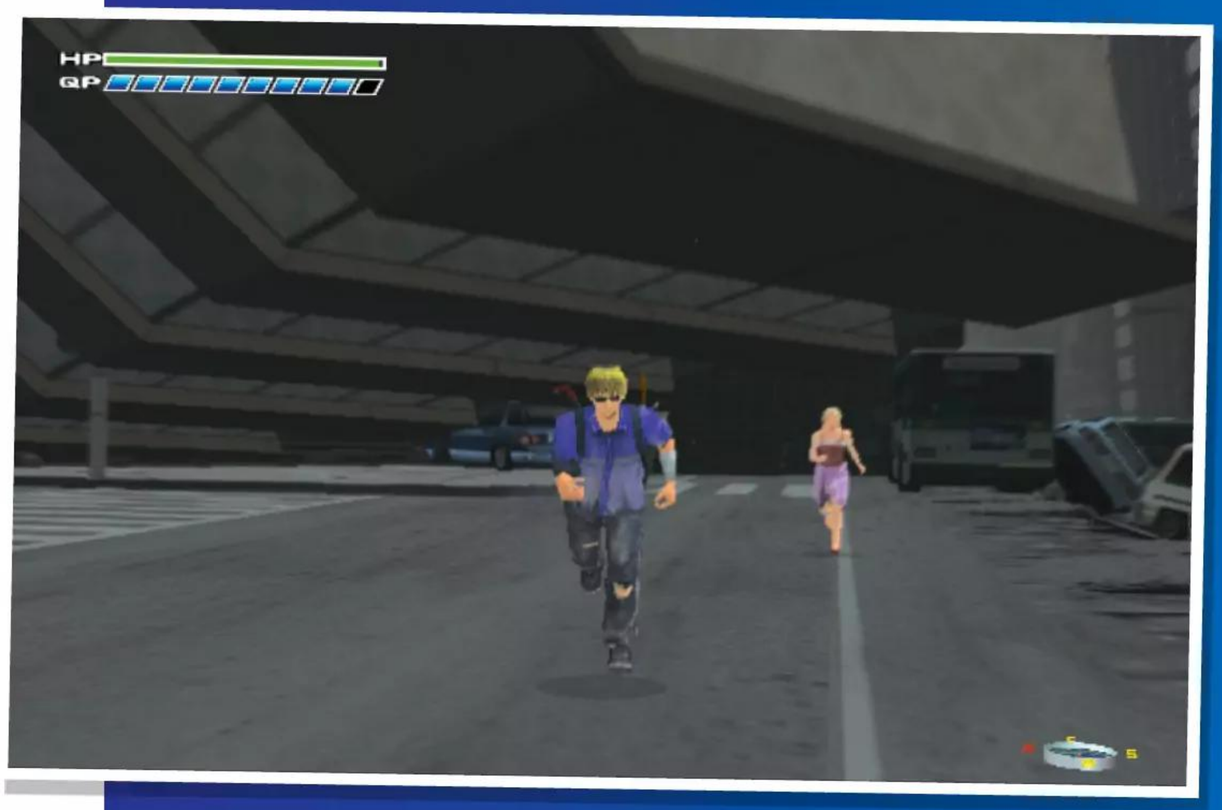


» [PlayStation 2] This machine defeats alien invaders, mostly because it fires actual lightning bolts.

SOS: THE FINAL ESCAPE 2002

TOTAL TECTONIC TERROR

Keith Helm has got his dream job on a newspaper, but it turns into a nightmare before he ever reaches his office for his first day, as a huge earthquake hits Stiver Island. This adventure, known as *Disaster Report* in North America, is technically slightly rough but possesses a unique atmosphere – the mostly deserted city is generally quiet, and danger comes from aftershocks and collapsing buildings rather than intelligent enemies.



» [PlayStation 2] Keith will probably dodge that collapsing building, but what about his companion back there?

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION 2003

EVOLVING THE ORIGINAL

The demise of the Dreamcast left Sega AM2 with the unenviable task of bringing its 3D fighting series onto the mighty *Tekken*'s turf, but it came out swinging with *Virtua Fighter 4*. This update retains the superb visuals and refined combat engine of that game, but introduces Brad Burns and Goh Hinogami to the character roster, and adds a Quest mode filled with AI based on real Japanese arcade players. It also has a notably excellent tutorial for newcomers to the series.

» [PlayStation 2] Judoka Goh sends Jacky crashing to the concrete with a hip throw.

» [PlayStation 2] Even after 24 years, *Rez*'s final stage is still a terrific assault on the senses.

REZ 2001

WELCOME TO SYNAESTHESIA

While it's been supplanted by a superb VR release, the original *Rez* is still a mesmerising PS2 title that carefully merges techno tunes with intense on-rails action. Debuting at the same time as the Dreamcast version, the PS2 game loses out by having softer-looking visuals, but greatly benefits from a more stable framerate. It's certainly not the trickiest game to complete and it's mechanically very simple (just move your reticle over an enemy and hold it down to create a combo of up to eight hits) but it's the fusion of sounds, vision and vibration (more so if you imported the Tranz Vibrator) that makes *Rez* feel so special. While each stage is cleverly constructed, becoming more graphically and musically expressive as you unlock new layers, it's Stage Five's breathtaking spin on the evolution of life that truly impresses and it remains just as mind-blowing to witness today as it did on release.

» [PlayStation 2] *Silent Hill 2*'s world is a dingy, dishevelled place that can be quite unsettling to explore.

SILENT HILL 2 2001

A DARK DELIGHT

It's telling that Bloober Team's recent update of Team Silent's exceptional survival horror game rarely strays from the template laid down by the original team. Critically acclaimed when it was released, *Silent Hill 2* remains one of the greatest survival horror games of all time, and time has done nothing to diminish its capacity to scare, nor has it dulled the strength of its writing, which deals with numerous adult themes and taboo subjects and was partly inspired by Fyodor Dostoevsky's complex 1866 novel *Crime And Punishment*.

Yes, you can argue that Silent Hill 2's combat is clunky, but its protagonist James Sutherland is just a normal man who finds himself in an abnormal world of twisted creations and dangerous situations. He's just desperate to be reunited with his dead wife and goes through the same psychological wringer as the player does. Be sure to seek out *The Director's Cut*, which is the definitive PS2 version.

RESIDENT EVIL 4 2005

SURVIVAL HORROR REIMAGINED

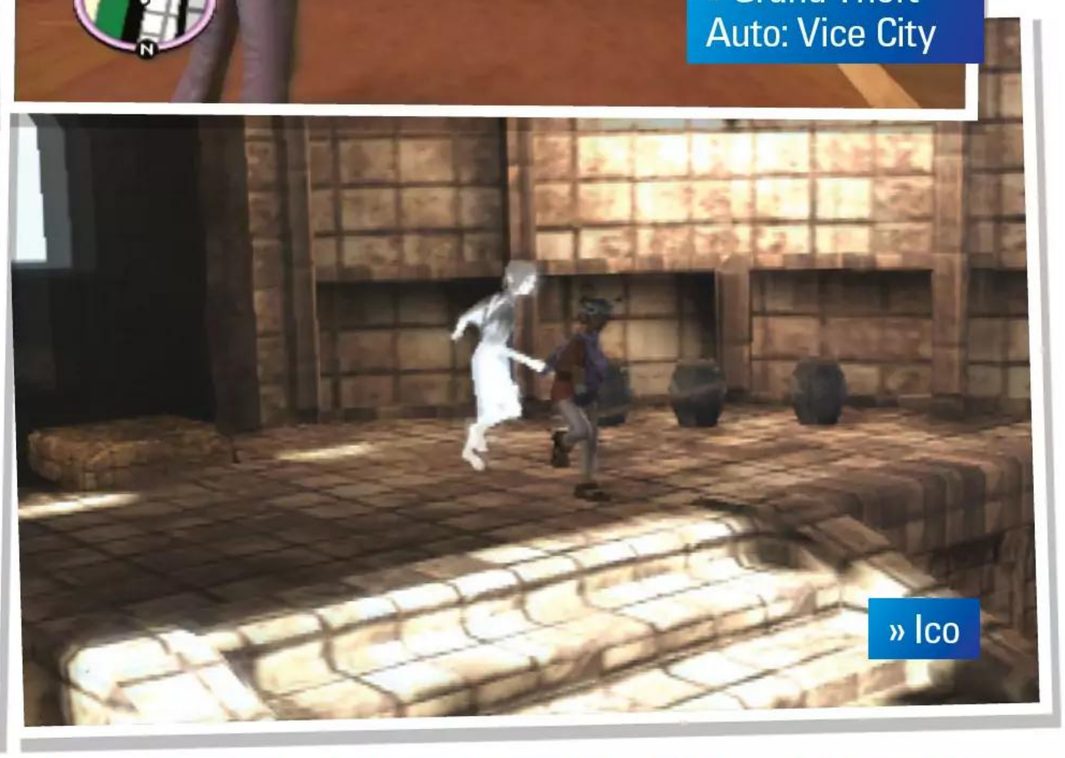
GameCube owners weren't happy when Capcom announced the then-exclusive sequel would be heading to *PlayStation 2*. Neither was creator Shinji Mikami who had famously proclaimed, "I'll cut off my head," if it ever appeared on another console (good news everyone: he didn't, and is still making games today). While the PS2 version is certainly a graphical downgrade in many areas compared to the GameCube original, there's still no denying the dark brilliance of Mikami's vision and it's also enhanced over the GameCube original by a more stable framerate and the inclusion of Separate Ways, a shorter adventure featuring antagonist Ada Wong. Even though Capcom recently remade its classic game and even commissioned an excellent VR version, the original still holds up brilliantly, making it one of the PlayStation 2's best action games.

» [PlayStation 2] It's easy to lose your head in *Resident Evil 4*, particularly if this guy connects with you.

» TimeSplitters: Future Perfect

» Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

» Gran Turismo 4



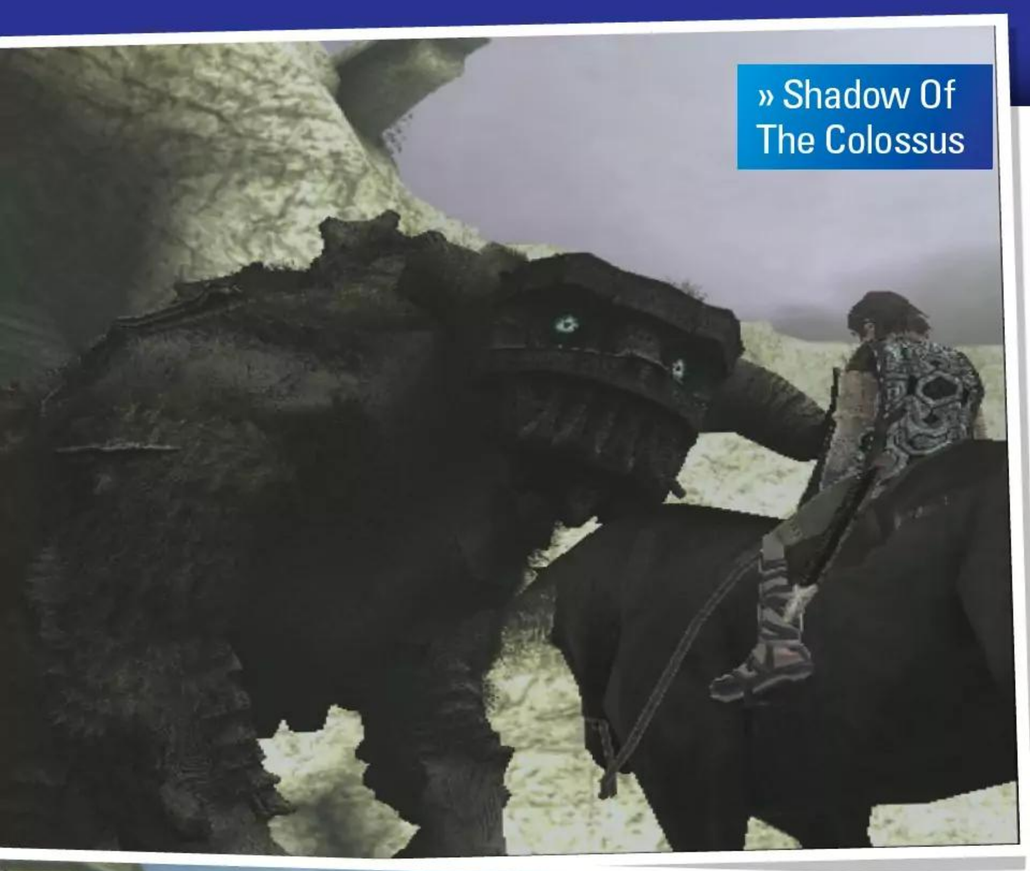
» Ico

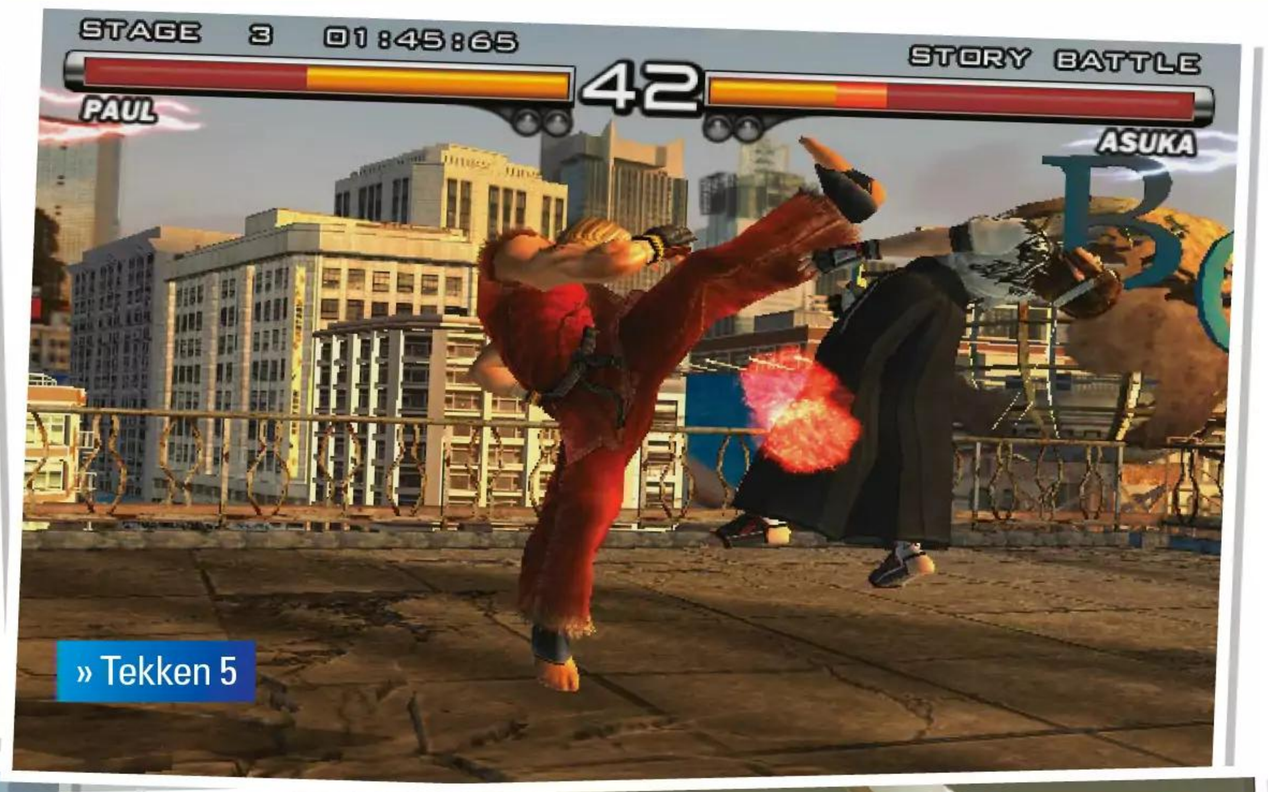
COLLECTOR'S CHECKLIST

WHAT'S ON YOUR SHELF?

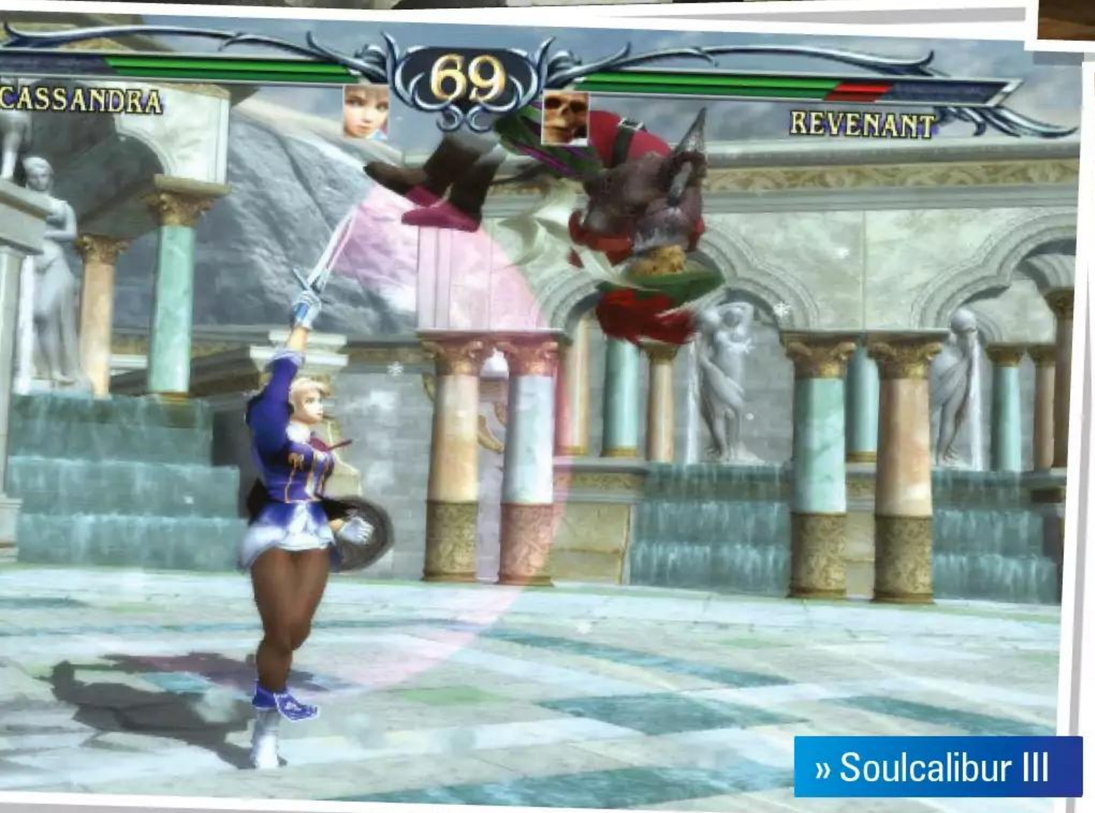
How many of these excellent PlayStation 2 games are already part of your collection, and which ones do you want to add? Here's a handy list of all 61 entries to keep track of them

- ❑ **RIDGE RACER V** (Namco) 2000
- ❑ **RED FACTION** (Volition) 2001
- ❑ **GITAROO MAN** (iNiS) 2001
- ❑ **CAPCOM VS SNK 2: MILLIONAIRE FIGHTING 2001** (Capcom) 2001
- ❑ **ICO** (Team Ico) 2001
- ❑ **SILENT HILL 2** (Team Silent) 2001
- ❑ **TIME CRISIS II** (Namco) 2001
- ❑ **SSX TRICKY** (EA Canada) 2001
- ❑ **HALF-LIFE** (Gearbox Software) 2001
- ❑ **REZ** (United Game Artists) 2001
- ❑ **JAK AND DAXTER: THE PRECURSOR LEGACY** (Naughty Dog) 2001
- ❑ **PROJECT ZERO** (Tecmo) 2001
- ❑ **MAXIMO** (Capcom Digital Studios) 2001
- ❑ **SOS: THE FINAL ESCAPE** (Irem) 2002
- ❑ **MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE** (EA Los Angeles) 2002
- ❑ **RATCHET & CLANK** (Insomniac Games) 2002
- ❑ **GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY** (Rockstar North) 2002
- ❑ **ACTIVISION ANTHOLOGY** (Contraband Entertainment) 2002
- ❑ **ZONE OF THE ENDERS: THE 2ND RUNNER** (Konami Computer Entertainment Japan) 2003
- ❑ **DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS** (Nippon Ichi Software) 2003
- ❑ **R-TYPE FINAL** (Irem) 2003
- ❑ **VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION** (Sega AM2) 2003
- ❑ **PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME** (Ubisoft Montreal) 2003
- ❑ **AMPLITUDE** (Harmonix) 2003
- ❑ **DODONPACHI DAIOUJOU** (Cave) 2003
- ❑ **FLIPNIC** (Sony Computer Entertainment) 2003
- ❑ **TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND** (Neversoft) 2003
- ❑ **WWE SMACKDOWN!: HERE COMES THE PAIN** (Yuke's) 2003
- ❑ **SLY 2: BAND OF THIEVES** (Sucker Punch Productions) 2004
- ❑ **KATAMARI DAMACY** (Namco) 2004


» Shadow Of The Colossus



» Tekken 5



» Soulcalibur III

» Yakuza

- ❏ **VIEWTIFUL JOE** (Clover Studio) 2004
- ❏ **SPIDER-MAN 2** (Treyarch) 2004
- ❏ **GRADIUS V** (Treasure) 2004
- ❏ **BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN** (Criterion Games) 2004
- ❏ **DRAGON QUEST: THE JOURNEY OF THE CURSED KING** (Level-5) 2004
- ❏ **METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER** (Konami Computer Entertainment Japan) 2004
- ❏ **GRAN TURISMO 4** (Polyphony Digital) 2004
- ❏ **TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT** (Free Radical Design) 2005
- ❏ **TEKKEN 5** (Namco) 2005
- ❏ **PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5** (Konami Computer Entertainment Tokyo) 2005
- ❏ ❏ **CAPCOM CLASSICS VOL 1 & VOL 2** (Backbone Entertainment) 2005/2006
- ❏ **THE WARRIORS** (Rockstar Toronto) 2005
- ❏ **SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS** (Sony Computer Entertainment Japan) 2005
- ❏ **RESIDENT EVIL 4** (Capcom Production Studio 4) 2005
- ❏ **SOULCALIBUR III** (Project Soul) 2005
- ❏ **NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED** (EA) 2005
- ❏ **ROGUE GALAXY** (Level-5) 2005
- ❏ **YAKUZA** (Sega New Entertainment R&D Department) 2005
- ❏ **DEVIL MAY CRY 3: SPECIAL EDITION** (Capcom Production Studio 1) 2006
- ❏ **BLACK** (Criterion Games) 2006
- ❏ **FINAL FANTASY XII** (Square Enix) 2006
- ❏ **OUTRUN 2006: COAST 2 COAST** (Sumo Digital) 2006
- ❏ **TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND** (Crystal Dynamics) 2006
- ❏ **OKAMI** (Clover Studio) 2006
- ❏ **HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY** (IO Interactive) 2006
- ❏ **GOD HAND** (Clover Studio) 2006
- ❏ **GOD OF WAR II** (Santa Monica Studio) 2007
- ❏ **ODIN SPHERE** (Vanillaware) 2007
- ❏ **GUITAR HERO III: LEGENDS OF ROCK** (Neversoft) 2007
- ❏ **PERSONA 4** (Atlus) 2008

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